DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 465 110 CE 083 448

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TITLE Lifelong Learning in the Netherlands: The Extent to Which Vocational Education and Training Policy Is Nurturing Lifelong Learning in the Netherlands. CEDEFOP Panorama Series.

INSTITUTION European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, Thessaloniki (Greece).

REPORT NO TI-42-02-755-EN-C

ISBN ISBN-92-896-0123-X

ISSN ISSN-1562-6180

PUB DATE 2002-00-00

NOTE 118p.

AVAILABLE FROM CEDEFOP, P.O. Box 22427, Thessaloniki, GR-55102 Greece (#5126 EN, free). Tel: 30 31 49 01 11; Fax: 30 31 49 01 02; e-mail: info@cedefop.eu.int; Web site: http://www.trainingvillage.gr/. For full text: http://www2.trainingvillage.gr/etv/publication/download/panorama/ 5126_en.pdf

PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC05 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS Adult Education; Continuing Education; Curriculum; Developed Nations; *Education Work Relationship; *Educational Attitudes; *Educational Needs; Educational Philosophy; *Educational Policy; Foreign Countries; Government Role; Labor Force Development; *Lifelong Learning; Policy Formation; Postsecondary Education; Public Opinion; *Vocational Education

IDENTIFIERS *Netherlands

ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to assess the extent to which lifelong learning strategies are being implemented in vocational education and training (VET) in the Netherlands. Lifelong learning was examined from these three perspectives: (1) the policy formation process of lifelong learning, including developing policy instruments and specific measures by government, social partners, and municipalities; (2) the pedagogical design (how providers apply the principles of lifelong learning in the organization and content of their learning activities at various levels); and (3) developments in participation in education and training. Data collection involved questionnaire and interviews with personnel managers, training managers, and trainers. The study found that policy formation in the Netherlands is focused on the contribution of lifelong learning in promoting employability and maintaining the competitiveness of the Dutch economy. In addition, the study found that there is no overall pedagogical design in Dutch lifelong learning, although emphasis is often being placed on technical skills and participation in education by adults is growing. Finally, the study found that education and training are important in the lives of the Dutch working population, with almost 50 percent having recently participated in a course and 70 percent of the general population of the country supporting the idea that adults must continue to learn in order to function in modern society. (Contains 93 references.) (KC)

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PANORAMA

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# Lifelong learning in the Netherlands

## The extent to which vocational education and training policy is nurturing lifelong learning in the Netherlands

Cedefop Panorama series; 21

Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2002

A great deal of additional information on the European Union is available on the Internet.
It can be accessed through the Europa server (http://europa.eu.int).

Cataloguing data can be found at the end of this publication.

Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2002

ISBN 92-896-0123-X
ISSN 1562-6180

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*Printed in Belgium*

The **European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training** (Cedefop) is the European Union's reference Centre for vocational education and training. We provide information on and analyses of vocational education and training systems, policies, research and practice.
Cedefop was established in 1975 by Council Regulation (EEC) No. 337/75.

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Published under the responsibility of:
Johan van Rens, Director
Stavros Stavrou, Deputy Director

# Foreword

The European year of lifelong learning was 1996, which brought much awareness and promotion of 'lifelong learning for all'. This was also the title of an influential OECD publication in the same year. Since then, lifelong learning has been in prominence on most education and training policy and conference agendas in Europe and has generated much debate. There has also been scope to put some of the theory into practice. Cedefop is setting up a reporting system on developments in lifelong learning in the Electronic Training Village (www.trainingvillage.gr), to monitor progress.

The reporting system will concentrate on delivering up-to-date information on developments, initiatives and research. In addition, there will be reports on the implementation of lifelong learning in systems of vocational education and training (VET) in selected countries. In summer 2000, studies were launched on the extent to which vocational education and training policies and actions nurture lifelong learning in four countries, Finland, Italy, the Netherlands, and Sweden.

Developing a 'system' that supports lifelong learning implies establishing links between a number of highly diversified learning areas, thus opening up opportunities for combinations and synergies not possible in one institutional setting. If supportive policies are being seriously implemented, there must be some evidence that learning is starting to spread over the lifespan. Learning that takes place intentionally and unintentionally at work, at home or during leisure-time, must be acknowledged for its worth, both to the individual and to the organisation. Policies should respond to the biggest challenge of giving all people a fair chance, and equal opportunities and access to learning throughout their lives, and not allow lifelong learning to become a mechanism that 'reproduces inequalities'.

This report assesses the extent to which lifelong learning strategies are being implemented in VET in Finland. It examines implementation and results achieved from a number of angles: the specific national context being addressed by policy, as well as its focus; the learning areas and structures implicated; the instruments and pedagogical methods used; the actors involved.

With publication of its Memorandum on lifelong learning (2000), the European Commission again placed this issue among its priorities. Cedefop is fully aware that vocational education and training is merely one facet of lifelong learning, which according to the memorandum has become the guiding principle for provision and participation in all learning contexts. Nevertheless, we hope this report will make a useful contribution to the debate and consultation process launched in the Member States as a follow-up to the memorandum.

Cedefop wishes to thank Dr Cees Doets and Drs Anneke Westerhuis (CINOP - The National Centre for Innovation of Vocational Education and Training) and Dr Barry J. Hake (Centre for Learning and Communication in Organisations, Leiden University), who prepared and edited this report on lifelong learning in the Netherlands, and the other members of the Dutch Consortium for Research on Lifelong Learning, who contributed to specific sections of the report: Dr Jittie Brandsma (Center for Applied Research on Education, University of Twente);

Drs Willem Houtkoop (Max Goote Kenniscentrum, University of Amsterdam); and Professor Dr Max van der Kamp (Department of Andragogy, State University of Groningen).

Stavros Stavrou
Deputy Director

Martina Ní Cheallaigh
Project Manager

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# Preface by the editors

During the last decades of the twentieth century, consensus on the standard biography in individual life-courses was increasingly brought into question. The three-phased life-course with (a) the acculturation phase of socialisation and vocational preparation, (b) the productive phase of forming a family and working, and (c) the withdrawal phase of retirement from work, has become less dominant. In each phase of life in today's society, new choices have to be made not only in personal life but also in the planning of a working career. Emergence of the notion of lifelong learning is intimately related to the flexibility and individualisation of life-courses. In this connection sociologists talk in terms of disappearance of the standard life-course and development of the choice life-course. A number of factors, in particular social, cultural and economic changes, exert their influence on flexibility of life-courses. In this regard, it is simplistic to view the development of lifelong learning merely in terms of rapid technological change and introduction of new forms of organising work. The fact that periods of learning follow after the youth phase is a sign that individuals continually have to make new choices and that new options are available.

The declining emphasis on concentrating learning in the youth phase has important consequences. This goes further than development of a system of provision that takes account of the diversity in learning-styles, learning possibilities and life experience of adults. The fact that adults return to learning raises the question on the responsibilities of government, the social partners and individuals for investing in lifelong learning. When more freedom of choice characterises individual life-courses, does this also apply to the decision to return to learning? To what extent is the individual adult responsible for investing in learning, and does this involve the norm of self-management? It is also necessary to question the positioning of learning as a stage prior to a change of career, social (re-)integration or changes in the work environment. This is a concept too often associated with the role of school-based learning as preparation for life. It does not imply that this model should be copied in planning the learning processes of adults.

Lifelong learning is a challenging concept for policy-makers, providers of education and training, and individual adult learners. It is not surprising, therefore, that Cedefop is setting up a reporting system on developments in lifelong learning, in the electronic training village (ETV) to monitor progress. The purpose of this study is to examine the implementation of policy and practice in support of lifelong learning, particularly in the field of vocational education and training (VET) in the Netherlands, and to assess to what extent VET policies and actions are influenced by lifelong learning.

The Netherlands does not possess a 'grand design' in the form of a comprehensive concept for lifelong learning. This partly results from the distribution of responsibilities among many actors who each possess a great degree of freedom in developing policy. The policy agenda in the area of employability is managed jointly by government and the social partners, the municipalities are responsible for priorities and the financing for second chance education,

while institutions for secondary vocational and higher professional education, together with commercial providers, are responsible for the development of the demand-led provision for adults.

This report presents an assessment of the state of the art with reference to lifelong learning in the Netherlands and has been prepared by members of the Dutch consortium for research on lifelong learning. To make the diversity of Dutch developments accessible, the report is organised in three parts. Lifelong learning is examined from three different perspectives. Two authors have been responsible for each theme: (a) policy formation in the area of lifelong learning; (b) the pedagogical design of lifelong learning; and, (c) developments in participation in education and training. This approach produces three coherent pictures of lifelong learning in the Netherlands.

**Part One** focuses on the recent policy-formation process on lifelong learning in the Netherlands, written by Professor Dr Max van der Kamp and Dr Barry J. Hake. Their contribution comprises an analysis of the policy-formation process of lifelong learning in the Netherlands; the development of policy instruments and specific measures by government, the social partners and municipalities. Their study shows that policy-formation by national actors such as government and the social partners is focused on the contribution of lifelong learning in promoting employability and maintaining the competitiveness of the Dutch economy. It was a conscious choice by the Dutch government to focus on employability and to invite the social partners to participate systematically in policy-making in this area. The authors warn that emphasis in Dutch policy on employability as individual economic performance can mean that lifelong learning policies will become over-sensitive to short-term economic developments in the labour market.

In **Part Two**, Drs Anneke Westerhuis and Dr Jittie Brandsma describe respectively the ways in which government-funded institutions for initial vocational education and training and non-funded commercial providers apply the principles of lifelong learning in the organisation and content of their provision of learning activities. Anneke Westerhuis stresses that both Dutch secondary vocational and higher professional education are struggling with defining the contents that anticipate lifelong learning. In higher professional education, this rethinking of learning contents is connected to questions about the function of higher professional education in the perspective of lifelong learning. Should it focus on learning for life or will learning for professional practice remain the core of higher professional education? In secondary vocational education, it is up to the educational field itself and the sector-based social partners to develop qualifications with an optimum mix of technical skills and transfer potential. So far, emphasis on qualifications appears to be on concrete technical skills, directly referring to activities in the workplace. Jittie Brandsma observes that rather little information is available on the question of the ways in which private providers incorporate lifelong learning in the design of their provision. She regards growing participation in company-based learning to be a sign that learning in the context of work is taken seriously in Dutch society. However, this growing participation is not reflected in the dissemination of new learning

concepts. Interest in new forms of learning, such as work-based learning, is so far purely academic.

In **Part Three**, Drs Willem Houtkoop and Dr Cees Doets focus on the development of participation in lifelong learning. They make use of data generated by two recent empirical studies of participation by adults in education and training. Their findings indicate that education and training are important in the lives of the working population with almost 50% having recently participated in a course. Although a modest 20% of people actually participated in courses for personal development, this percentage indicates an increase over the past. Learning for personal and social development seems to be increasingly important. In general more than 70% of the Dutch population support the proposition that adults must continue to learn in order to function in modern society.

This study of Dutch developments in lifelong learning is written in response to an European initiative. The questions posed by Cedefop make it possible to assess developments in the Netherlands in a broader perspective. This study therefore ends with an editorial contribution that summarises the state of the art in the Netherlands in terms of issues considered important by Cedefop: (a) structure and policy framework; (b) curricular developments and content, learning strategies and methods; and, (c) support measures to promote participation and access, modes of delivery and actors.

Dr Cees Doets

Dr Barry J. Hake

Drs Anneke Westerhuis

's-Hertogenbosch/Leiden

8 March 2001

# 1. Lifelong learning policies in the Netherlands: an analysis of policy narratives, instruments and measures

**Dr Barry Hake, Leiden University, and**
**Professor Dr Max van der Kamp, State University of Groningen**

## 1.1. Introduction

It is currently difficult to find a Dutch policy document on education and training which does not make use of 'lifelong learning' to: (a) legitimise general policy strategies, (b) underpin the choice of policy instruments, or, (c) argue in favour of specific policy measures. This reflects widespread general consensus since the early 1990s in policy documents from the European Commission, Unesco, OECD, G7, and a host of non-governmental organisations in the field of education and training, and national government policy deliberations. Success in realising lifelong learning is broadly seen as an important factor in meeting the challenges of globalisation and the knowledge society, promoting the competitiveness of economies, fighting unemployment and creating jobs, promoting individual employability and securing the social inclusion of groups at risk of marginalisation (Hake, 1999b). Despite the strong degree of interest in lifelong learning expressed by politicians, employers, trade unions and the educational community, it is still not evident that there is any universal agreement on what the term 'lifelong learning' actually refers to, or what a system of lifelong learning might look like in practice. This clearly inhibits clarity of analysis with regard to questions concerning:

(a) necessary changes in the organisation of education and training given the current emphasis on investments in front-ended initial education;
(b) recognition of formal and non-formal learning environments;
(c) relationships between initial and post-initial education in a system of lifelong learning;
(d) balance between core competences and specific skills;
(e) sequential phasing of incremental policy to bring about change;
(f) appropriate policy instruments and specific measures to be adopted.

It is also significant that ongoing discussion of lifelong learning policies is not confined to the politics of education and educational institutions. Given the turbulent economic and societal environments which frame the current discussion on lifelong learning policies, broader policy communities are now involved in shaping responses to the restructuring of global and national economies, fundamental demographic change, and fiscal pressures. This means that a greater variety of government departments are now involved in policy-making and its implementation, and that the social partners have also become increasingly influential stakeholders in the lifelong learning debate with regard to employability. As such this creates a more dispersed policy-formation process, requires agreements on respective financial responsibilities of government, social partners and individual citizens for investments in

lifelong learning, and contributes to a networked arrangement for policy implementation by different parties. Furthermore, despite the consensual rhetoric on the need for lifelong learning, there is often a lack of specification both with regard to how society as a whole, organisations and individuals would benefit, or not, from lifelong learning, and how the distribution of benefits – both direct and indirect - should be monitored and measured.

In this first part of the study for the Netherlands, the methodology adopted is that of 'policy narrative analysis'. This form of interpretative analysis focuses upon policy statements in terms of their narrative (re-)construction of lifelong learning policies as responses to the changing economic and societal environment. Given that many stakeholders are involved in the policy-formation process, there will be a variety of potential policy narratives that contribute to the policy-making process. In this sense, the study of policy narratives is imbedded within but is a development of conventional policy studies that focus upon policy objectives and preferred policy instruments in terms of the relationships between governments and interest groups.

Narrative analysis in this study will focus in particular upon the construction of policy narratives in terms of their understanding of 'lifelong' and 'lifewide' dimensions of lifelong learning. With reference to the 'lifelong' dimension, this means that policy narratives will be examined in terms of the ways in which they formulate a lifespan perspective towards the (re-)distribution of education and training opportunities throughout the lifecourses of individuals. The lifewide dimension will be examined in terms of the degree to which involvement in learning is imbedded in activities related to work, caring and other forms of social participation. Using this approach, an analysis is made of lifelong learning policy narratives in the Netherlands with reference to following narrative themes:

(a) policy environment;
(b) lifelong learning in government policies;
(c) contribution of the social partners to lifelong learning;
(d) coordination of educational, labour market, social and cultural policies with regard to lifelong learning;
(e) financial arrangements for lifelong learning;
(f) trajectories through initial and post-initial education and training;
(g) relationships between formal and non-formal learning.

Analysis of policy narratives will focus above all upon documentary materials with specific reference to:

(a) government discussion documents, policy papers, legislation and administrative measures;
(b) position papers and policy documents from the social partners;
(c) reports by relevant advisory councils;
(d) secondary statistics from a variety of public sources.

The researchers had access to all government policy documents up to 30 September 2000, while a search of relevant websites provided access to documentation from the appropriate government advisory committees in the same period.

## 1.2. Changing policy environments

Since the Second World War there have been significant changes in public policies towards adult education and vocational education and training (VET) in the Netherlands. While initial VET has been largely regulated by appropriate legislation on publicly financed secondary education, post-initial VET was largely a concern of the social partners, training arrangements agreed in collective labour agreements, and the private sector of both accredited and non-accredited commercial providers of post-initial training. Until the mid-1970s, the focus in government policy towards social-cultural adult education was placed upon a so-called 'residual' policy, which emphasised the role of voluntary initiative as the basis of provision supported by government subsidies, for example, residential colleges and popular universities. There was also a limited direct responsibility of government for the acquisition of formal educational qualifications by adults at evening schools governed by the law on secondary education. Adults could enrol for courses at evening schools that were identical to the forms of secondary education providing initial education for the young. Other adults opted in large numbers for accredited correspondence education to improve their personal and vocational qualification levels.

During the early 1970s, the emancipation ideas of the late 1960s began to exert an influence upon adult education policies in terms of 'permanent education' (Lange, 1969). In the Netherlands, a broadly-based grass-roots coalition with close links to the second women's emancipation movement gave rise to a variety of popular adult education initiatives such as social orientation courses for women and community-based refresher courses for adults. In the mid-1970s, there were demonstrations by adult learners in The Hague that demanded government subsidies for second-chance adult education and led to debates in the Dutch parliament. Emphasis in Dutch government policy was redirected towards the equality of opportunity function of general adult education for low-qualified adults. Equal chances for all and educational opportunities for disadvantaged groups became important justifications for government policy in stimulating new forms of both second-chance and second-way adult education (Ministry of Education and Science, 1975). During this period, the open school for adult basic education was established, while evening adult schools were also allowed to offer courses during the daytime that led to greater participation by women. The Open University (OU) was also established in 1984 as part of the expansion of second-chance higher education for low-qualified adults. In the same year, public responsibility for the provision of social-cultural adult education was decentralised to the municipalities.

The policy environment changed radically from the mid-1980s onwards. High levels of unemployment and cuts in public expenditure led government to redirect adult education policy towards its economic functions and with an emphasis on adult vocational education and training. It was thought necessary to reduce the high levels of unemployment especially among young people and the structurally unemployed, and to raise levels of active participation in the labour market. Education and training were increasingly seen as instruments for the acquisition of 'start qualifications' in order to secure (re-)entry to the labour market. Publicly financed provision of adult education was extended from the second-

chance provision of general education for educationally disadvantaged groups to include adult vocational education and training for (re-)integration in the labour market. This gave rise to a fragmented system of publicly financed adult education and a large private training sector that was described at the time by the OECD as in a state of 'profound sense of confusion' (OECD, 1991), which failed to address the training needs of the unemployed and low-skilled workers, and a lack of attention for lifelong learning entitlements.

From the early 1990s onwards, government policy started to address such issues, and in particular the integration of the system of public provision following the Adult Education Framework Act in 1991. This law introduced a national system of adult basic education and adult general education (VAVO) under the law on secondary education. Still greater changes followed the 1996 Adult Education and Vocational Training Act (*Wet op educatie en beroepsonderwijs* – WEB). This law established the integration of secondary vocational education (MBO), together with adult basic education and adult general education (educatie) in the BVE sector for vocational and adult education. This constituted a major reorganisation of adult and vocational education and training sectors based upon the new regional education centres (ROCs). The WEB granted significant autonomy to ROCs for institutional policy, but they were also expected to establish intensive contacts with relevant stakeholders - especially municipalities, the social partners, and local employers - in their regions.

In the high economic activity of the late 1990s with steadily declining levels of unemployment, emphasis on the labour-market function of adult education and vocational training has been strengthened further. The transformation of the Netherlands into a knowledge-based economy has contributed to emphasis on maintaining the employability of the workforce through continuous updating of knowledge and skills. Successive policy papers and statements by interest groups increasingly emphasise the need to enhance the competitiveness of the Dutch economy, its transformation into a knowledge economy, and the need for a well-educated workforce responsible for and able to manage its own employability.

It is in this policy context that lifelong learning has now become an important political priority and the case for lifelong learning possesses above all a labour-market rationale geared to the enhancement of employability.

Since the early 1990s, there has been a growing consensus in the European Union and Member States on the importance of lifelong learning as a crucial element among responses to the challenge of globalisation, development of the knowledge society, competitiveness of the European economies, maintenance of employment through economic growth, and the need to promote social inclusion of potentially marginalised groups. Despite this rhetorical consensus, however, national States have responded differently to these challenges in terms of their respective policies towards conditions of employment, social security, flexibility of the labour market, and individual employability (Green et al., 1999; van Wieringen and Attwell, 1999).

A number of arguments can be advanced on the current priority given to lifelong learning in the Netherlands:

(a) demographic factors, such as the declining number of young people and the growing number of the elderly;
(b) rapid increases in knowledge and technological innovations lead to demand for the continuous updating and improving of knowledge and skills among even young graduates;
(c) the implications of the transformation of the Dutch economy into a knowledge economy;
(d) high levels of economic growth combined with comparatively low unemployment;
(e) a shortage of well-qualified employees combined with lack of basic qualifications among both the employed and job-seekers;
(f) significant structural non-participation by specific groups in the labour market;
(g) the requirement for older workers to remain longer in employment;
(h) emergence of a 'grand strategic coalition' between government, employers, and trade unions which drives policy towards lifelong learning;
(i) current consensus in the policy discourse on 'employability' as the core justification for lifelong learning.

With regard to the 'grand strategic coalition' in the Netherlands between government, employers and trade unions in support of lifelong learning and employability, it is pertinent to refer to this particular coalition as a consequence of the very specific construction of pluralistic and inclusive policy-formation in Dutch society, which has become commonly known as the 'Polder model'. From the Wassenaar Accord (*Wassenaar Akkoord: Centrale aanbevelingen inzake aspecten van een werkgelegenheidsbeleid, 24 november*) in 1982 onwards, successive Dutch governments - whether with a right-of-centre or left-of-centre identity - have engaged in close cooperation with the social partners in creating the conditions necessary for turning around the Dutch economy from conditions of high structural unemployment common to all European economies.

Building upon a longer tradition of consensus-politics in the Netherlands known as the 'politics of accommodation', the 'Polder model' involves continuous, systematic and intensive consultation of the social partners in policy-making and decision-making on all questions relating to the economy, labour market, labour relations, conditions of employment, social benefits, and education and training. This process of permanent consultation has resulted in successive agreements to limit wage increases especially in the public sector, limiting working hours to create jobs, privatisation of the public sector, deregulation of the economy, reduction of the costs to employers of social security provision, flexibilisation of the labour market, stimulation of job-creation through part-time employment, redistribution of working and caring tasks, and combined use of collective labour agreements and fiscal measures for employers to promote post-initial vocational education and training. More recently, the consultation democracy of the 'Polder model' has found expression in broadly-based shared willingness to examine seriously the respective responsibilities of government, social partners and individuals for investments in vocational education and training to

promote lifelong learning policies driven by the notion of employability (Social and Cultural Plan Office, 2000).

## 1.3. Vocational education and training: the challenge of lifelong learning

The full implications of development of lifelong learning policies for initial and post-initial VET in the Netherlands are as yet not easy to discern. There is even less clarity on the potential implications of lifelong learning for the reconstruction of relationships between initial and post-initial phases of VET in creating recurring opportunities for participation in lifelong learning throughout working-life. Furthermore, the division of responsibilities for investments in lifelong learning between government, the social partners and individual learners means that it is exceptionally difficult to assess the long-term consequences of the wide array of policy measures either already implemented or currently under consideration. Neither the rhetoric nor policy statements which narrate the necessity of lifelong learning for employability sit happily with current patterns of participation in education and training and its distribution over the life-course. For these reasons, it is useful to examine some basic parameters of the current situation, which provide a benchmark of both levels of investment and patterns of participation in education and training throughout working life.

### 1.3.1. Supply-side investments

On the **supply-side of investments in education and training**, comparative studies indicate that the Dutch government currently spends less on education and training than other comparable countries and that expenditure has declined systematically in the past two decades. In 1987 Dutch government expenditure on education and training was 7% of the gross national product, but this had declined to 5.2% in 1998 compared to the average of 6.2% for all OECD countries (OECD, 1999a). Forecasts suggest a further decline to 4.7% by 2003. Official policy statements regard this as the result of savings derived from the greater efficiency of educational institutions while maintaining educational standards. In quantitative terms, the average number of 16 years spent in initial education in the Netherlands is comparatively long among OECD countries. In qualitative terms, however, comparative studies suggest that Dutch initial education scores only an average level among OECD countries. The 1997 report on the competitive potential of the Dutch economy (Ministry of Economic Affairs, 1996) not only confirmed this picture of comparatively low public investment in education and training and questions about quality. It also pointed to the comparatively low level of investment in vocational training activities by Dutch businesses – 0.6% of GNP; the low percentage of firms organising training – 56%; and the comparatively low levels of participation by employees in education and training – 26%. It also reported a relatively low level of private compared to public investment in vocational education and training.

With regard to the consequences of these relatively low levels of investment in qualifications of the Dutch labour force, the report argued that 60% of the labour force had completed secondary education. Generational differences are significant, however, with 69% of the 25 to 34 age group in possession of at least a secondary education diploma, while 44% of the 55 to 64 cohort have completed secondary education. Moreover, in its 1997 annual report, the education inspectorate concluded that the general educational level of the Dutch population was stagnating in terms of international comparisons (Education Inspectorate, 1998). Furthermore, the OECD has also reported that 37% of the labour force is not in possession of a basic qualification (OECD, 1998). On the basis of the international adult literacy survey scores, the large majority of the Dutch population possess levels 2 and 3 middle-range competences, while compared to other OECD countries, there is a lower number with high – levels 4/5 – competences. Illiteracy among the adult population remains a problem, however, and the Literacy Promotion Foundation (*Stichting Belangenbehartiging Alfabetisering*) reported, in its action plan presented to the *Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschappen* - Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (hereafter referred to as OCenW) in August 2000, that one million Dutch adults or 10% of the adult population are functionally illiterate and that 800 000 of these are indigenous Dutch citizens.

Economic developments in the Dutch labour force were also significantly evident in the benchmarking report 2000 (Ministry of Economic Affairs, 1999). It focused on the factors that exclude a significant section of the potential labour reserve from securing access to an increasingly tight labour market. It referred in particular to the removal of barriers to participation in the labour market by the generation of 55 to 64 year-olds, immigrants, women and the low qualified. On these four groups, the report argued that the Netherlands scores only average to low in comparative terms with regard to their labour-market participation, and that this is an expression of serious 'structural inactivity'. It confirmed, furthermore, that the Netherlands performs poorly in comparative terms in both public and private investments in the education and training of these potentially important segments of the labour reserve. The OECD expressed similar concerns in its most recent economic survey (OECD, 2000a).

The same benchmarking report for 2000 concluded that the organisation of the system of post-initial vocational training as a contribution to lifelong learning in the Netherlands is far from optimal at the moment. It argued that the development of a 'knowledge and participation economy' calls for the continuous development of human capital, recognition of the changing demographic structure of the population, and efforts to promote the inclusion of social groups excluded from the labour market. In terms of preconditions for a system of lifelong learning, the report referred to the need to: (a) create more time for training in the workplace; (b) establish greater clarity for both employers and employees on the benefits of education and training; (c) reduce the high costs of continuing vocational training, and (d) the need for a transparent and differentiated supply of education and training by both public and private organisations.

### 1.3.2. Demand-side participation

The **demand-side of education and training** in terms of lifelong learning, is expressed in the patterns of participation by adults in education and training across the life-span. In terms of participation in initial education, the Netherlands performs well among OECD countries with 79.8% of all 18-year-olds involved in some form of full-time education and training, with almost 40% entering higher education. However, while levels of participation in secondary vocational education and training are comparatively high, there are significantly high and worrying levels of non-completion. The current participation rate of the adult Dutch population in education and training activities is currently 37.7% on an annual basis (van der Kamp, 1997). This is 39.6% for men, and 35.8% for women. However, countries such as Sweden - 53.3% - and the United States - 41% - would appear to be further on the road towards a 'learning society', while there is in particular a lower level of participation by adult learners in Dutch higher education institutions compared to other countries (Hake et al., 1999). Furthermore, participation of the adult population in lifelong learning is unequally distributed over the life span. Above 45 years of age, the participation rate in all forms of adult education and training declines significantly to 20%, while it is only 10% among the over-60s.

For the generation aged between 26 and 35, the level of participation in education and training is higher than that for the population as a whole with 49.7% of men participating compared to 42.0% of women. Of those in employment, 49.9% participate in education and training, while the active labour market policy leads to 48.7% of the unemployed participating in some form of education and training. The level of participation by 46 to 55 year-olds is significantly lower than the average for the whole adult population. While 31.9% of men participate, this is 29.2% for women. Of those in employment, 36.3% participate in education and training while only 14.2% of the unemployed in this older cohort are involved in any form of education and training. Among the age group of 56 to 65 year-olds, participation in education and training is very significantly lower than the average for the total population. Significant here is that while 13.2% of men participate, the participation rate for women in this category is actually higher at 20.8%. Of those still in employment between 56 and 65 years of age, 22.5% participate in education and training which is lower than comparative levels in OECD countries. Participation of the unemployed is significantly lower in this age group at 13.3%. Rates of participation for the cohort of 66 to 75 year-olds are 8.8% for men and 12.5% for women. These rates do not differ significantly from comparable levels in other countries.

Taken as a whole, it is clear that current levels of participation by adults in education and training are seriously skewed towards younger adults and against the older generation. With regard to the male-female variable, sex seems to be a factor in participation among older working adults with more men participating than women. Among the younger generation of adults sex-based determination of participation would appear to be less significant. Younger women are more likely than older women to be active in the labour market and this probably explains the higher levels of participation by women in the younger cohorts. There is here the crosscutting influence of work and non-work as an explanatory variable. Those in work are in

general more likely to participate in education and training in all ages cohorts, but this is significantly lower among older workers. However, the level of initial education remains the most potent among explanatory variables in determining levels of participation in education and training across generations. This adds strength to the so-called 'accumulation hypothesis' (Tuijnmen, 1989) to the effect that the quantity and quality of education and training already acquired is a major determinant of participation in later periods of life. When the variable of ethnic origin is introduced into the equation - which will be discussed in depth later - it is clear that members of ethnic minorities possess lower levels of initial education and lower levels of participation in adult education and training.

This empirically-based benchmarking of the current balance between the supply-side and demand-side suggests there is good reason to express concern about the potential realisation of 'lifelong learning for all' in the Netherlands in the short term. The current generation of young people demonstrates a high level of participation in initial education and is perhaps a guarantee of future high levels of participation in post-initial education and training. However, there are questions about the quality of initial education and the high levels of premature school-leaving without a basic qualification. The current generation between 26 and 35 appears to manifest a strategy of 'learning to survive' in a flexible labour market dominated by the employability thesis, which is characterised by high levels of participation in education and training among both young men and women. Nevertheless, the educational levels of the older generations are significantly lower among many of those still in work who are not in possession of a basic qualification, while there is a comparatively low level of investment in older workers. This could be the source of serious problems in the near future when it becomes increasingly difficult to withdraw early from the labour market and working life is extended to 60 or even 65. The realisation of lifelong learning is not a policy only for the younger generation currently in initial education. Lifelong learning for employability affects the lives of adults who long ago left initial education and training, including those less likely to participate in adult education and training, and those who are not targeted for investment in education and training. Many do not possess the levels of education and training required to express their learning needs, manage their own learning processes or improve their prospects of remaining in employment (Hake, 1999a).

## 1.4. Lifelong learning reaches the Dutch policy agenda

The implications of the change of emphasis in public policy towards adult education during the mid-1980s from social-cultural education towards adult general education and VET were clearly expressed in the 1991 *Declaration of intent* by the new coalition government. This stated that '...education and training can no longer be the preserve of the young. Knowledge is our society's main resource: we must keep it up to standard through lifelong learning!'. The emergence of lifelong learning on the Dutch policy agenda was further developed in a discussion document (Ministry of Education and Science, 1993a). Lifelong learning was formulated here in terms of its contribution to the competitiveness of the Dutch economy, the

development of a knowledge-intensive society and emphasised the importance to businesses of lifelong learning as a means of maintaining employee productivity. More specifically, this document argued in favour of two basic principles to guide public policy towards lifelong learning in the Netherlands.

Firstly, it argued that 'at the heart of the idea of a lifetime of learning lies the need for a normative framework conducive to the achievement of basic qualifications by as many people as possible'. Building upon the core ideas in the report by the Rauwenhoff Committee (Ministry of Education and Science, 1991) in 1990, it proposed that the core of government responsibility was to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to gain a 'start qualification'. This would enable them '...to obtain a level of qualification needed to function in society on the basis of a stable position in the labour market'. This basic qualification was interpreted as the level appropriate to the completion of an apprenticeship. The achievement of this level of basic qualification was to be guaranteed not only for the young prior to entry to the labour market, but also for those adults either in work and the unemployed without such a qualification level. Secondly, the 1993 discussion document sought to establish lines of demarcation between the respective responsibilities of government, social partners and individuals in the financing of lifelong learning. Basic to the demarcation of government responsibility was the distinction drawn between 'broad and lasting qualifications' and 'narrow, sector-specific and shorter-lived qualifications'. It proposed that the responsibility of government was limited to the acquisition of a basic qualification in terms of broad and lasting qualifications in preparing a sound basis for lifelong learning. Government was not regarded to be responsible for investments in types of education and training provision that serve the specific interests of individuals and employers. Further, government financial responsibility was formulated in terms of a limitation upon citizens' entitlements to publicly financed education and training on the basis of an age criterion. It was argued that 'it is reasonable to suppose that by the age of 27 most people have had sufficient opportunity to achieve a basic qualification and with it the means to permit stable participation in society'. Drawing upon the rules governing the system of public financial support for students in higher education, it was proposed that citizens' entitlements to benefit from publicly financed education and training at secondary vocational education level and beyond be limited to 27 years of age. After 27, participation would be open to all, but tuition fees should be flexible and fixed by the institutions themselves in the market place for education and training. Exceptions were to be made for those who had not achieved the basic qualification by the age of 27 and for whom there would be government financial support. Taken together these principles led in practice to a limitation of the Dutch government's responsibilities for lifelong learning to the guarantee of a 'start qualification' for all, and a limitation on entitlements to benefit from publicly financed education and training up to the age of 27 for those possessing a start qualification.

The Dutch government did not ignore growing international interest in lifelong learning manifested by the European Union during the early 1990s and the European year of lifelong learning in 1996. While the level of activity in the Netherlands during the European year of lifelong learning was relatively low key, the period March 1996 to March 1977 was devoted

to a National Knowledge Debate (*Nationaal kennisdebat*). Initiated by the Minister for Education, Culture and Sciences, the national knowledge debate (NKD) was designated as an exploration of the increasingly important role played by knowledge in society and specific reference was made to the 'knowledge society' and the competitiveness of the Dutch economy. A rapidly emerging policy consensus on the priority of lifelong learning limited the sense of an open-ended debate during the NKD. In the final report (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 1997), lifelong learning was regarded unanimously as a necessity for individuals to be able to function in the knowledge society. On measures to promote the realisation of lifelong learning, the report emphasised the need for clarity in determining the respective responsibilities of government, education and training institutions, employers and individuals for investments in lifelong learning. It argued that government should stimulate lifelong learning in terms of promoting individual wellbeing and the dynamic of the economy, but that the specific responsibility of government should be directed towards those less able to adapt to the 'cultural revolution' associated with lifelong learning. This was clearly related to the priority given in the report to the responsibility of individuals to maintain their employability through lifelong learning and to contribute themselves financially. A key responsibility was given to the social partners for the realisation of lifelong learning in the workplace through the promotion of active education and training policies. The report argued the need for greater political clarity about the responsibility of government for lifelong learning, the basis for a policy to stimulate lifelong learning, and the appropriate financial and organisational infrastructures. It proposed that the government should urgently develop an integral policy on the division of responsibilities and specific policy instruments.

The conclusion of the NKD in March 1997 was immediately followed by the appointment in April 1997 of a cabinet committee on lifelong learning chaired by the Prime Minister. This committee was intended to develop the recommendations of the NKD in the form of a national programme for 'a lifelong learning' with specific reference to the responsibilities and financial costs for government, businesses, education and individual citizens. Membership of the committee included the Ministers for Education, Economic Affairs, Social Affairs and Employment, while three representatives of the social partners were appointed as advisers. The committee's report was accepted by the cabinet and published in the form of a national action programme in January 1998 (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 1998b). This national action programme proposed three scenarios with a maximum scenario of NLG 1165 billion (EUR 528.65 billion) funding for concrete policy measures in the four years of a new cabinet's period in office. Proposals concerning investments in lifelong learning were divided into three distinctive clusters: employability of the employed and job-seekers; employability of teachers; prevention of educational dropout and the reorientation of education towards lifelong learning.

With regard to the first cluster, the national action programme placed great stress on lifelong learning in relation to the labour market and the promotion of employability. In the opening sentence, the programme argued that 'the Dutch economy is performing well', but it immediately posed the question 'whether the country can be successful in maintaining a top

place in a rapidly changing world'. The Dutch-language version of the national action programme was 12 pages long and the term 'employability' was mentioned on at least 30 occasions. Employability was defined in terms of: 'people's capability to find and keep jobs' (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 1998b, p. 7). Measures proposed included the appointment of 'employability advisers' to provide guidance and counselling for employers and employees especially in small and medium-sized companies; assessment centres to accredit prior learning and work-place learning; firms which 'invest structurally in their employees' would be able to acquire the 'investors in people' award which has been licensed from the United Kingdom. Employers and employees were to be offered tax advantages for their respective investments in education and training. Emphasis was also placed on reducing the barriers for the unemployed in reentering the labour market. The responsibility for learning was placed upon individuals who were expected to work throughout their working lives on maintening their personal employability. It was proposed that 'all people, young and old, are firstly and naturally responsible for themselves. You have to learn to take care of yourself, and therefore, you must want to acquire the knowledge and skills to do that. Those who do not participate will be reminded of their responsibilities' (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 1998b, p. 9). Financial measures in this context were formulated largely in terms of fiscal measures for firms and individuals.

When it came to the proposed 'new' government expenditure on lifelong learning, it soon became clear that the priority areas were initial education for the young rather than for adult learners. With regard to cluster three on preventing educational disadvantage, recommendations included: lowering the age of compulsory education to four to improve the educational progress of children from ethnic minorities; learning to learn to be promoted in secondary education, while dropouts from secondary and vocational education should receive intensive and individual guidance - again a measure directed at ethnic minorities. In cluster two concerning the employability of teachers, one third of the promised expenditure in the whole national action programme was directed at measures to improve the continuing professional development and employability of teachers in primary and secondary education. The almost complete absence of references of the contribution of higher education to the promotion of lifelong learning was one of the most remarkable aspects of the national action programme for lifelong learning. Only one sentence in the whole report was devoted to the possibility that higher education institutions might develop 'maintenance contracts' with their graduates for participation in post-initial courses for the purpose of professional updating.

On the whole, the national action plan for lifelong learning was concerned with the improvement of primary and secondary initial education to prepare the younger generation for a future of lifelong learning. Exceptional was the almost complete absence of any reference in the report to the potential contribution by the VET sector to the realisation of lifelong learning. Policy measures for learning in later life were restricted to tax incentives for employers and employees, the possibility of dual trajectories for learning in combination with work, employability consultants and assessment centres, and the recognition of 'investors in people'.

When presented to the second chamber of the Dutch parliament, the national action plan was criticised by the political parties. The government was asked to formulate much more specific priorities and decisions about the funding available, although the government had specifically stated that this is a task for the next cabinet. Following the general election in May 1999 and the reappointment of the Purple coalition - comprising the social democrats, liberals and Democrat 66 parties - the national action plan in its original form effectively disappeared from the policy agenda (Eurydice, 2000) - and the website of OCenW! The new cabinet pushed forward its policy priorities for increased expenditure on initial education – such as reducing the size of classes in primary schools, solving the shortage of teachers, stimulation of ICTs - without reference to lifelong learning as a legitimation for such policies. Lifelong learning effectively reemerged on the policy agenda in terms of a more closely focused 'employability agenda' as the core of national policy for promoting lifelong learning in the Netherlands. A report published in June 1998 by the Labour Foundation (*Stichting van de Arbeid* – StvdA), was of greater significance than the national action programme itself in indicating major policy priorities (Labour Foundation, 1998). The Labour Foundation argued that:

'Ideally an employability policy should mean that employees fulfil a job appropriate to their skills and remain able to do this or another job in the labour market. Such an approach places an employability policy in a broad framework. An employability policy includes more than education and training, although these are important components of such a policy. In fact it involves an integral approach in which the conditions of employment, social policy and the organisation of the workplace are equally important'.

In this context, the new government's *Declaration of intent* in August 1998 referred to lifelong learning in terms of policy instruments focusing on fiscal benefits for employers and individuals, encouraging more flexible learning trajectories with an emphasis on 'dual trajectories' combining learning and work, and the key role of VET in the regional education centres in promoting a regional infrastructure for lifelong learning. These priorities were subsequently formulated in the budget statement for 1999, which was submitted by OCenW to the Dutch Parliament in September 1998. This argued that:

'A lifetime of learning is a necessity in a rapidly changing society. For some lifelong learning may sound like a punishment but the opposite is the case: lifelong learning involves a society in which people are offered permanent opportunities to continuously develop skills. This naturally means that citizens make use of these opportunities. As such, lifelong learning will involve a cultural change in society and create an awareness that it is in the general interest. All this is predicated upon an intensive common approach, on the one hand by educational institutions, firms and social partners, and on the other hand by the government, including the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science as well as other government departments and local authorities. This approach will create the conditions to meet the recurrent demand for education and the intended cultural change' (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 1999b).

## 1.5. Emergence of the employability agenda

The significance of the new employability agenda for lifelong learning is based not only upon the involvement of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, but also involves the active participation of the Ministry of Economic Affairs and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment. In this context, the social partners are expected to play a highly significant role and this was marked with a joint agreement between the employers' organisations and the trade unions in December 1998 committing them to work on the development of an employability agenda. To this end, an employability agenda platform was established which involves representatives of the three ministries – with OCenW in the chair – and the Labour Foundation representing the social partners. It reports on progress to the annual spring and autumn rounds of consultations between the government and the social partners.

As agreed by the government and the social partners in June 1999, the *employability agenda* (*Employability-Agenda*, 1999) comprises 10 action points as follows:

(a) expanding the opportunities for dual trajectories combining learning and work as part of the agreement between the government and the social partners in June 1998 on working learning creates opportunities (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 1998a);
(b) the introduction of core competences within the national vocational qualification structure;
(c) preventing premature school leaving without a start qualification;
(d) promoting intersectoral employability and mobility;
(e) experiments with the investor in people award to employers;
(f) further introduction and development of accreditation of prior learning (APL);
(g) experiments with employability advisers in small and medium-sized businesses;
(h) more flexible training trajectories for job seekers including use of APL;
(i) establishing an employability monitor to measure the effects of training programmes and identify risk categories;
(j) improving the employability of employees and job-seekers without start qualifications.

The comparatively low level of unemployment in the Netherlands – now less than 3% compared to an average of 9.3 % in the European Union - the large number of unfilled vacancies, and the severe shortage of qualified personnel entering the labour market provide the focus of policy. The emphasis within the employability agenda is placed upon (a) enhancing social and cultural inclusion through active involvement in the workplace; and (b) promoting employability through the introduction of greater flexibility in education and training trajectories and rapid re-integration in the labour market. These very specific characteristics of the Dutch labour market and lifelong learning policy are also reflected in the national employment action plans (NAP) submitted annually by the Dutch government since 1998 within the framework of the European Union's programme to combat unemployment. The EU's guidelines for national employment action plans in 1998 required a statement of priorities and measures with reference to 19 action points. With reference to action point 5 'the Member States and the social partners will endeavour to develop possibilities for lifelong

learning', the Dutch NAP for 1998 (Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, 1998a) focused on the national action programme for lifelong learning.

The 1999 guidelines called in action point 6 for priorities and measures:

'In order to reinforce the development of a skilled and adaptable workforce, both Member States and social partners will endeavour to develop possibilities for lifelong learning, particularly in the fields of information and communication technologies, and ...define lifelong learning in order to set a target according to national circumstances for participants benefiting from such measures. Easy access for older workers will be particularly important'.

In its NAP 1999 (Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, 1999), the Dutch government expresses its support for the EU's definition of lifelong learning in terms of:

'all purposeful learning activity, whether formal or informal, undertaken on an ongoing basis with the aim of improving knowledge, skills, and competence' In addition to a reference to the employability agenda, the Dutch 1999 NAP refers to the following measures to promote lifelong learning:

(a) reduction of school-leaving without a start qualification with special reference to the urban conglomerations;
(b) to enhance the attraction of the teaching profession through the modernisation of working conditions and personnel policy;
(c) extending fiscal facilities for training to the non-profit sector and the social economy;
(d) transforming the ROCs into broadly-based open-learning centres for VET;
(e) more flexible study financing of students to permit combinations of learning and work;
(f) to secure integrated educational trajectories of seven years to encourage the transfer from secondary vocational education (MBO) to higher vocational education (HBO);
(g) improve cooperation between businesses and VET in a national network of techno-centres.

The centrality of measures to promote lifelong learning in the employability agenda and the national employment plans clearly indicates the close relationship in the Netherlands between the priorities in government economic and employment policies and the focus upon promoting the external and internal employability of the Dutch population. In the words of the 1999 NAP:

'Only a well-educated and lifelong learning labour force can make use of the opportunities offered by this employment policy, while investment in education, knowledge and skills strengthens the quality of employment, prevents the outflow of older people and can absorb the demand for more high qualified people on the labour market'.

The following section will examine specific aspects of the implementation of the employability agenda to achieve labour market objectives through initial and post-initial education and training.

## 1.6. Flexible learning trajectories and diversity of learning environments

Current government policy for initial and post-initial education and training, together with the new measures under consideration within the framework of the employability agenda, place significant emphasis upon the promotion of greater flexibility in available learning trajectories and greater diversity of learning environments to facilitate tailor-made combinations of learning and work for lifelong learners. This is inspired by individualisation processes in society and the increasing redistribution of learning throughout working life and because participants in education and training will comprise more diverse populations. In this section attention is devoted to measures announced in recent policy papers on the development of: (a) flexible dual trajectories combining learning and work; (b) the accreditation of prior learning; (c) individual learning accounts and educational leave; (d) the use of the multimedia and ICTs to facilitate open an virtual learning environments; and, (e) regional infrastructures in the form of knowledge networks.

### 1.6.1. Flexible learning trajectories in education and training

The problematic articulation between the rapidly changing requirements of the labour market and the quality of initial VET in secondary vocational education has been a continuing cause of concern in the Netherlands from the early 1980s onwards. From the work of the Wagner Committee in 1984, through the reports of the Rauwenhoff Committee in 1990 (Rauwenhoff, 1990), and the van Veen Committee on Dualisation in 1993 (Ministry of Education and Science, 1993b), policy has been dominated by the issue of developing a system of IVET that can respond to developments in the labour market. Despite the shift in priorities from the period of high (youth) unemployment in the mid-1980s to low unemployment and the current shortage of qualified manpower on a broad front, there has been a significant degree of continuity in Dutch government policy with regard to introduction of flexible learning trajectories. These involve **dual trajectories** characterised by variable combinations of formal learning in educational institutions with diverse forms of work-based acquisition of competences and skills.

This concern with flexible forms of dual initial vocational education and training to meet the changing needs of the labour market resulted in the 1996 Law on Adult Education and Vocational Education (WEB). The WEB established a national system of vocational qualifications comprising four levels of competences. These qualifications could be acquired by following one of two but equal dual routes: (a) a preparatory vocational trajectory in full-time secondary vocational education in combination with 20 to 60% practical training (*beroepsopleidende leerweg - bol*), and (b) a work-based vocational training trajectory in combination with 20 to 40% day-release study (*beroepsbegeleidende leerweg – bbl*). The *bol* trajectory can be followed in both full-time and part-time variants. The ROCs established by the WEB are responsible for these two dual routes, which provide the basis for the future development of VET at the secondary vocational education and training (MBO) level. To

promote tailor-made provision of education and training to meet the needs of individuals, the WEB established the legal duty of ROCs to provide appropriate guidance and counselling.

The relevance of the *bol* and *bbl* trajectories for lifelong learning and, in particular, participation is manifested in the following statistics.

*Table 1: Participation in MBO by age in 1998 as % of total enrolled per trajectory*

(%)

| | *bbl* | *bol* full-time | *bol* part-time |
|---|---|---|---|
| 15 | 0.7 | 1.9 | 0.1 |
| 16 | 8.1 | 16.2 | 0.9 |
| 17 | 14.3 | 24.0 | 1.5 |
| 18 | 14.3 | 23.5 | 1.7 |
| 19-21 | 28.2 | 28.6 | 11.4 |
| 22-27 | 19.1 | 4.7 | 27.0 |
| 28-39 | 11.5 | 0.8 | 36.9 |
| 40-64 | 3.8 | 0.3 | 20.4 |
| >65 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.1 |

*Source*: Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. *OCenW in Kerncijfers 2001*. Zoetermeer: Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2001.

Table 1 clearly demonstrates that the *bol* full-time trajectory is overwhelmingly attended by relatively young participants coming straight from school. This is the case in all sectors and applies to both young men and women. This is less the case with the *bbl* work-based trajectory which is also followed by many who are returning to training and do not come straight from school. This is even more the case with the *bol* part-time trajectory where participants are predominantly older than 21 and the largest group is aged 28 to 39. Of the participants in this part-time trajectory, 20.4% are older than 40. This indicates the potential significance of part-time secondary vocational education for the realisation of lifelong learning for older adults. In terms of the numbers of participants following courses to acquire the minimum 'start qualification' at levels 1 and 2 in the national qualification structure, they mainly participate in the *bbl* trajectory, where 69 900 are studying at levels 1 and 2 compared to 66 100 at levels 3 or 4. In the *bol* full-time trajectory, 47 900 are studying at levels 1 and 2 compared to 210 300 following levels 3 and 4 courses. For the *bol* part-time trajectory these figures are 5 700 at levels 1 and 2 with 16 400 at levels 3 and 4.

Given the now completed reorganisation of VET in the ROCs, the priority in the coming period will focus upon the further development of flexible dual trajectories. In its 1999 advisory report (Social-economic Council, 1999a), the *Sociaal economische raad* (Social-economic Council - SER) examined the need for greater flexibility, the possibilities for easier transfer between the two learning trajectories, and the strengthening of work-based learning. This was also recognised in the annual reports by the Education Inspectorate and government in its policy position paper *Agenda BVE* (Education Inspectorate, 1999). This was followed in 2000 with the cabinet's response (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2000b) to the

SER report, which referred to the installation of an independent working party to evaluate the WEB (*Stuurgroep Evaluation WEB*) which will report in 2001. This evaluation will pay specific attention to the flexibility of dual trajectories in achieving the tailor-made provision laid down in the WEB. In June 2000, the Labour Foundation published a paper *Meer prioriteit voor het beroepsonderwijs* (More priority for vocational education) which called for a significant strengthening of the vocational education and training sector, and it took the initiative to establish a task force on vocational education. The cabinet responded positively to this initiative and will participate in it together with the social partners. Government priorities for the sector were reinforced in September 2000 with the publication of the policy report *Koers BVE: Perspectief voor het middelbaar beroepsonderwijs en de volwasseneneducatie* - BVE on course: perspectives for secondary vocational education and adult education (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2000a). The implications for ROCs in terms of regional cooperation will be addressed in Section 1.6.8. below. Suffice it to say here, that this report reemphasised the role of ROCs in contributing to lifelong learning, and it proposed that adult general education (*educatie*) component of ROCs be renamed as 'adult education' (*volwasseneneducatie*) to stress this point.

### 1.6.2. Strengthening work-based learning

In its 1997 advisory report, the Advisory Council for Science and Technology Policy (*Adviesraad Wetenschaps- en Technologiebeleid* - AWT), was critical of the tendency in the national knowledge debate to consider lifelong learning in terms of recurrent periods of formal education and training. The AWT proposed that much more attention be given to the acquisition of knowledge and skills in the workplace within a policy to promote lifelong learning. The importance of flexible learning trajectories and work-based learning as a contribution to lifelong learning and the employability agenda was an important feature of the SER advisory report in 1997 (Social-economic Council, 1997). It pointed to the need to pay more attention to the development of more second-chance opportunities for older employees, job-seekers and returnees to the labour market.

The report proposed the development of flexible trajectories that focus on work-based learning and the acquisition of a basic qualification and the updating of skills. This priority was also emphasised in the 1998 report *Een leven lang lerend werken* [A lifelong learning and working] by the Labour Foundation and the 1998 accord *Hoofdlijnenakkoord inzake versterking werkend leren* - Working learning creates opportunities (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science et al., 1998) between the government and the social partners. The Labour Foundation report argued that work-based learning is of particular significance in post-initial VET and constitutes the most important instrument for the promotion of lifelong learning in relation to the employability agenda. It also emphasised the role of the workplace as a learning organisation that needs to provide greater opportunities for individualised and flexible learning trajectories.

The 1999 advisory report on flexibility in learning trajectories by the SER (Social-economic Council, 1999a) also examined the need for strengthening the work-based learning component in post-initial vocational education and training. It argued that flexibility was not only of importance in the initial phase, but that it will become of increasing significance for both those in work and job-seekers as an aspect of lifelong learning. The report indicated that the emphasis on the individual's responsibility for maintaining personal employability will lead to increased demands from new groups of learners for flexible forms of post-initial part-time VET and work-based learning. The SER called in particular for greater flexibility in the work-based vocational training trajectory (*bbl*) in secondary vocational education to create opportunities for adults to acquire a basic qualification through work-based learning. In this regard, the report also proposed the development of APL as an important contribution to more flexible trajectories for the increasing diversity of participants in vocational education and training. It also pointed to the need for didactical innovations such as self-directed and problem-based learning together with the application of ICTs in support of open virtual learning environments. While the SER supported the contribution of work-based learning in the promotion of lifelong learning and maintaining the employability of workers, it also pointed to the need to develop the workplace as a 'powerful learning environment'.

### 1.6.3. Advantages of work-based learning for specific groups

A significant number of concrete measures have been introduced to strengthen work-based learning trajectories in a number of areas. Despite the rapid development of dual trajectories in secondary vocational education, this sector is still characterised by dropout levels of between 30% and 40%. This is one of the most significant contributors to premature school leaving in the Netherlands and the subsequent failure of young people to acquire a start qualification. With reference to priorities 3 and 10 on the employability agenda, this specific problem has been addressed in the MDW-project on premature school leaving, which was commissioned by the Ministry of Economic Affairs within the framework of the operation market principles, deregulation and legislative quality (*Operatie Marktwerking, deregulering en wetgevingskwaliteit* – MDW). In its reaction in June 2000 to the report *Alle wegen leiden uiteindelijk naar een startkwalificatie* (All paths lead eventually to a start qualification), the Dutch cabinet recognised the need for a third trajectory, which is intended for those young people who fail to complete either of the two existing dual trajectories, the *bol* and *bbl*. This proposed new trajectory will be entirely work-based and requires the agreement of a learning contract - so-called individual qualification contract (*kwalificatiecontract*) - between the employer and the young worker involved. The work-based learning trajectory will involve the provision of guidance and counselling, accreditation of prior learning, utilisation of ICTs, while the introduction of a system of education and training vouchers will be investigated for this target group. It is also proposed to extend this system to young people in penal and care institutions. The government also regards this alternative work-based learning trajectory as an additional measure within the plan for tackling premature school leaving (*Plan van Aanpak Voortijdig Schoolverlaten*), which gives municipalities a key role in tackling the combined problems of premature school-leaving and unemployment among young people up to the age

of 23. With regard to premature school leavers this will involve strengthening the provisional regional registration and coordination (RMC) centres for the compulsory registration of premature school leavers, and the duty of municipalities to provide each individual with a personal trajectory of guidance, training and work experience in order to get them into permanent employment and the acquisition of a start qualification. The Regional Registration and Coordination Act became effective in January 2001. Other initiatives include the recent establishment of an Internet site on premature school-leaving together with a public information campaign at regional level. Further, two special projects have been established in the vocational education sector involving European Social Fund subsidies for the period 2000-06. One project involves a programme to reduce premature school-leaving in vocational secondary education, while the other is concerned with strengthening access for risk categories in the *bbl* trajectory at regional level.

The government has also proposed to make the work-based trajectory available to older workers with financial support from the European Social Fund - and to job-seekers on benefits and without a start qualification. The latter would involve an extension of the training measures available for those on unemployment benefits. The government implemented the offer of new work-based training trajectories to the long-term unemployed from 1 August 2000 as part of the Job-seekers Employment Act (WIW) and the jobs programme for long-term unemployed. While the government has long been committed to providing counselling, individual work and training trajectories, and subsidised jobs (Melkert-jobs or ID-jobs) for each young unemployed person up to the age of 23, it has now extended this commitment to the unemployed above 23 with a target date of 2002. The development of dual trajectories and work-based learning is also being extended to cover the very high numbers of Dutch adults on occupational disability benefits in an effort to reintegrate them in employment. Under the Handicapped Reintegration Act (REA), the government increased in April 2000 the funds available for tailor-made trajectories for the disabled which comprise guidance, training and work experience on the road back to employment. However, the recent evaluation report on the functioning of the REA was highly critical of the low level – 30% - of successful placement of candidates in employment.

### 1.6.4. Dual paths in higher education

The 1997 report by the AWT also expressed its concern that the discussion of dual trajectories was too narrowly focused on VET and argued that much more must be done in higher education to promote flexible combinations of learning and working. While dual trajectories have been developed in Dutch initial higher education in recent years, particularly in institutions for higher professional education (HBO), the AWT pointed to the need for concerted government policy in this direction. In the 1999 higher education and research plan 2000 (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (1999a), hereafter referred to as HOOP 2000)), government policy towards flexibilisation is formulated in terms of the demand from a more diverse population of students for flexible and tailor-made learning trajectories. It sees this as an important aspect of lifelong learning and that dual trajectories can play an important

role in meeting this demand. HOOP 2000 directs particular attention to the development of access routes from MBO to HBO as a significant area for the development of dual trajectories that can include those already in employment. HOOP 2000 directs particular attention to the development of access routes from MBO to HBO as a significant area for the development of dual trajectories that can include those already in employment. In the academic year 1999/2000, there were more than 350 dual HBO courses, although the 5000 students involved still constitute a small minority of all enrolled students. These involve dual trajectories for the initial training, for example, of nurses and primary school teachers, but also include dual trajectories with placements in small and medium-sized firms during the last two years of an HBO course. While dual trajectories have now become a normalised feature in HBO, they have only recently acquired an experimental status in university education (WO). In the academic year 1999/2000, there were 28 degree courses in WO organised as dual trajectories. The status of 'dual students' is now recognised as equivalent to full-time students for the purposes of the student finance system. Dualisation of courses in both HBO and WO involves close cooperation between the educational institutions and the employers with a view to guaranteeing the educational quality of the work-based learning component of dual trajectories.

Dual trajectories in higher education have been focused mainly on the initial phase of higher education. However, the AWT report in 1997 argued that the dualisation of learning and working within the context of lifelong learning should result in a shorter initial phase of higher education followed by recurrent periods of work and learning. It proposed that the development of dual trajectories could be of increasing significance in the post-initial phase of higher education. In this regard, the greater flexibility offered by dual trajectories could be more appropriate to continuing professional development, updating of knowledge and skills, and the requalification of both employees and job-seekers who will make demands upon post-initial higher education in the future. This is recognised in HOOP 2000 which argues that higher education must not only prepare students for the self-directed acquisition of knowledge and skills demanded by lifelong learning. Higher education institutions will be confronted with the demand from graduates to continuously update their knowledge and skills and they will need to respond to this demand for lifelong development processes.

As such, this will involve a significant challenge to higher education institutions that currently have a low profile in the market for post-initial education and training. The development of a more significant contribution by higher education institutions to lifelong learning and employability were an important feature of the SER's response to HOOP 2000. This placed great emphasis on the increasing diversity of the demand for higher education throughout working life and the need for greater flexibility in learning trajectories, dualisation, the development of APL, and the application of ICTs to create open learning environments. Some initiatives in this area can be reported. Higher professional education institutions increasingly cooperate with small and medium-sized companies in providing tailor-made dual programmes for the retraining of employees from MBO to HBO level in specific sectors such as in the metal industry. Further, there is a scheme of cooperation between some higher professional education schools and major banks, which involve the dual training-up of employees with a

secondary vocational education qualification in the banking sector (MEAO) to the higher professional level (HEAO).

In recognising the comparatively low levels of participation by Dutch teachers in continuing professional development, the government's policy document on lifelong learning (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 1998b) placed much stress on promoting the employability of teachers. None the less, recent policy discussions have been dominated by the very serious shortfall in the number of teachers available in the Dutch educational system especially in large cities. In its 1999 policy document *Maatwerk voor morgen het perspectief van een open onderwijsarbeidsmarkt* (Tailor-made solutions for tomorrow) (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 1999c), the government announced a comprehensive programme to deal with this issue. Measures proposed included raising the numbers of people entering teacher training, opening up the labour market in education, new ways to recruit teachers, reform of teacher-training, quality systems, improving the personnel policies and the conditions of employment. A relatively successful strategy has been the national campaign to encourage ex-teachers – especially married women - to return to teaching following a course of re-training and work experience. Also proving successful is the new temporary law on horizontal transition (*Interim Wet zij-instroom*), which encourages people to leave jobs in other sectors and to train as teachers in later life. Teacher training colleges provide short dual trajectories in this context in cooperation with schools and placement agencies. This was part of the effort to break open the labour market in education to non-traditional recruits as an aspect of lifelong learning and career change. With regard to secondary vocational education provided by ROCs, a number of agreements have been announced which will provide training, language instruction and work experience for political refugees with higher educational qualifications in technical subjects from their land of origin. This is part of the impulse vocational education programme, which has allocated specific funds for horizontal transition to teaching in the higher professional, secondary vocational and initial vocational education sectors. A similar programme for highly educated refugees was announced in the action plan *In Goede Banen: Een aanpak van de knelpunten op de arbeidsmarkt* [In good jobs: tackling bottlenecks in the labour market] (hereafter referred to as *In good jobs*) ([1]), which will involve an experimental project with dual trajectories to equip them for jobs in the ICT sector where there are severe shortfalls in qualified personnel. Coordinated by the Ministry of Education in cooperation with the Foundation for Refugee Students, these dual trajectories will last two years and be based upon higher professional schools and placements in ICT firms. The possibility whether such dual trajectories can be extended to other areas with severe shortfalls of qualified personnel such as the health and care services will be examined. Other such initiatives include short dual trajectories for well-educated but unemployed immigrants in the province of Limburg, which involve cooperation between the HBO institution, three ROCs, the labour mediation service and the chamber of commerce.

([1]) Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, 2000.

However, as the statistics quoted by Houtkoop in Section 3.1. demonstrate, higher education institutions and ROCS play only a modest role in the total market for post-initial vocational education and training for lifelong learners in the Netherlands. This was also the conclusion of the report by Hake, Van de Kamp and Slagter on the contribution of Dutch higher education to lifelong learning. Their statistics show an actual decline in the numbers of adults enrolled on part-time courses in universities (WO) and higher professional education institutions (HBO) together with the Open University, while at the same time the average age of both full-time and part-time students is also on the decrease.

*Table 2: Part-time enrolments in initial courses HBO, WO and OU 1980-98*

| | 1980 | 1985 | 1990 | 1993 | 1995 | 1998 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| HBO | 78 738 | 72 599 | 52 958 | 47 578 | 41 491 | 42 929 |
| WO | 4 035 | 10 184 | 14 693 | 11 587 | 10 351 | 11 800 |
| OU | | 14 546 | 36 075 | 32 100 | 25 051 | 23 500 |

*Source: Central Statistical Office 1991, 1998*

This might provide support for the conclusion that while the adult learning industry in the Netherlands is expanding rapidly, it is dominated by the private sector of commercial providers and that publicly financed higher education institutions have yet to take the initiative on a broad front. In the area of higher education level courses, 69 000 of the total of 153 000 part-time students older than 30 are following courses provided by the private sector. As Houtkoop concludes, the question is whether Dutch public higher educational institutions are able and equipped to operate successfully in this market for lifelong learning. As part of the employability agenda, an MDW project commenced in September 2000, which investigates the current functioning and future of the education and training market in the Netherlands. It was completed in April 2001, and will be subsequently discussed with the social partners.

### 1.6.5. Accreditation of prior learning

In its 1997 report, *Versterking secundair beroepsonderwijs* [Strengthening secondary vocational education], the SER argued for the introduction of **accreditation of prior learning** (*Erkenning van verworven competences*) as an important element in the development of flexible learning trajectories with an emphasis on work-based learning for older learners. To facilitate more flexible learning trajectories, there is now a firm commitment by the Dutch government to promote the development of mechanisms for the accreditation of prior learning (APL) as was announced in the interdepartmental policy paper *In good jobs* in March 2000. Following the proposals concerning APL reports by the SER and AWT in 1997 together with the 1998 report on lifelong learning by the Labour Foundation, accreditation of prior learning has become one of the major points on the employability agenda. The development of APL is regarded as a significant contribution to the individualisation of learning trajectories that will facilitate the transparency and recognition of both general competences and specific skills acquired in the workplace and elsewhere.

Greater flexibility in learning trajectories will be enhanced when prior learning can be translated in terms of the national vocational qualification structure which will add a civil effect to the accredited competences acquired in prior learning. This would facilitate access for individuals, especially those without a basic qualification, to continuing education and training to gain a recognised diploma. The government and the social partners have agreed to develop a common approach to the introduction of APL targeted at both the employed and job-seekers including those without a basic qualification. A joint working party is currently examining the possibilities of both a national system and more specific sectoral approaches to the implementation of APL. This will include experimental pilot projects in secondary vocational education (MBO), higher professional education (HBO), and a number of economic sectors. Also under consideration in the longer term is the introduction of a legal right for individuals to have their competences assessed and the possibility of a tax deduction for individuals who voluntarily choose to have their competences assessed. According to its latest progress report on activities with regard to work and education, the Ministry of Economic Affairs (2000) is planning to establish a national APL Expertise Centre, while there is also a proposal to develop a European assessment forum with other EU Member States. Given the serious shortage of highly qualified employees in the Dutch labour market, OCenW gives serious consideration to the application of APL in the area of both initial and post-initial higher education in the HOOP 2000 in 1999. The rapid nature of technological change in the knowledge society means that there will be an increasing need to update knowledge and skills in later life among those who have completed higher education together with upgrading those with secondary vocational education qualifications. This requires that higher education meets this demand for continuing education and will need to make use of APL to facilitate the progress of 'mature' students often with extensive work experience. In this manner, higher education institutions will be able to offer tailor-made learning trajectories for individual students with work experience and facilitate their requalification and employability.

### 1.6.6. Individual learning accounts

While (paid) educational leave has been much discussed since the early 1970s as one of the most suitable instruments of public policy to promote **individual entitlements** to recurrent education and lifelong learning, it has been largely restricted in the Netherlands to the collective labour agreements between the social partners in specific sectors. However, the 1998 Career Breaks Funding Act now regulates a national system for the financing of leave taken by employees which can be devoted to undertaking education and training. This law permits all employees to opt for a period of leave from work for the purpose of: (a) fulfilling care tasks in the family; (b) nursing the terminally sick; and (c) education and training to improve employability. Leave must last at least 2 months up to a maximum of 18 months, and comprise at least 50% of normal working-time. In the case that an employer recruits an unemployed or handicapped person as a replacement, the individual taking leave receives a basic financial allowance from the State. However, the law does not regulate 'paid leave' as such unless the employer voluntarily continues to pay the individual's salary, and there is also a risk of losing rights to income-related benefits such as housing subsidy and child care. Also

under consideration is a fiscal measure which will enable employees to save up to 10% of their annual income free of tax when the sum accumulated is earmarked for periods of leave which can include education and training.

A further manifestation of individualisation in lifelong learning policy measures is the government's expressed intention to undertake an experiment, in cooperation with the social partners, with **individual learning accounts** which will be directed in the first instance at employees without a basic qualification. As formulated in the March 2000 interdepartmental policy paper *In good jobs*, these accounts would be built up on the basis of financial contributions by government, employers and employees. They would not replace the fiscal facility for employers to provide education and training, but are regarded as an important complementary incentive for individual workers to engage in tailor-made learning efforts to improve their personal employability. The system for individual learning accounts will require that time for education and training is made available by employers, and that income-maintenance is guaranteed during the training period. This can be secured through use of the existing Career Breaks Funding Act, and the proposed system to enable employees to save tax deductions earmarked for the purposes of leave. The cost of education and training courses must not form a barrier for workers making use of individual training accounts, and to this end the government is considering a financial guarantee of access to suitable courses. Also under consideration is the introduction of personal education and training budgets for job-seekers, workers without a basic qualification, older workers, and in the longer term those on disability benefits. Instead of subsidising the providers of education and training, these budgets would comprise financing the demand by individual consumers through a voucher-system enabling them to purchase education and training as they see fit. In the cabinet's response to the report *Alle wegen leiden uiteindelijk naar een startkwalificatie* (All paths lead eventually to a start qualification) in June 2000, the government proposed to investigate the feasibility of a system of 'training vouchers' for premature school-leavers as a variant upon individual learning accounts. This report was particularly focused on the worryingly high levels of non-completion in secondary vocational education provided by ROC's. It argued that vouchers might provide a better financial stimulus for young people to reenter training by enabling them to purchase training from ROC's, employers or private training companies. This will be further explored as part of the employability agenda.

### 1.6.7. ICTs in creating open learning environments

The promise of major innovations in education and training has frequently been associated with the application of the information and communication media in the facilitation of instructional and learning processes. This has been historically the case with the introduction respectively of the printed word, film, telephone, radio, television, the audio and videocassette recorder, and the personal computer, while more recently the development of multimedia combined with ICTs are seen as major factors in the development of powerful learning environments. The self-directed learning of the autodidact, correspondence education, educational radio and television, and computer-assisted learning have all been regarded as

important manifestations of the flexibility and individualisation of distance education and open learning. During the 1970s and 1980s, the conjunction of these developments in the delivery of education and learning led in the Netherlands to the development of distance learning in the form of the multimedia Open School and the Open University. The Open School became a part of the regular provision of adult basic education in the late 1980s and is now integrated in the provision of adult education by ROCs.

Current ICT initiatives in the Netherlands largely focus on major investment programmes in initial education from primary through secondary to higher education. This is based upon improving the numbers of computers in schools, the availability of software and access to the Internet. The April 1999 government policy document *Education online* (*Onderwijs Online*) emphasised the aspiration to link all educational institutions to the national kennisnet (knowledge network) by mid-2002. In June 2000, the government announced a revised target for the end of 2001 together with an additional budget for this purpose. This network offers educational institutions ICT online facilities including educational software, access to the Internet and a virtual space for the dissemination of information and services for the public education sector. All institutions have been granted additional funding in 1999 and 2000 to increase the availability of ICT hardware. The availability of Internet connections varies from 38% of primary schools to 100% of ROCs and higher education institutions. Such initiatives by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science form part of the national action programme for the electronic highway and they include the creation of an ICT monitor to observe developments. Recent reports in this context have included progress reports on the integration of ICT in Dutch education (Doornekamp, 2000) and more specifically higher education (van Geloven, 2000). These reports indicate that the Dutch formal education system as a whole scores at an average level in comparative terms. A specific point demanding action is the training and retraining of teachers in the use of ICT at all levels of the Dutch educational system. From autumn 2000, teachers are able to acquire a certificate - so-called digital driving licence - upon successful completion of an online test of their ICT skills.

In the areas of initial and post-initial vocational education, emphasis is placed upon the application of ICTs to facilitate flexible, tailor-made and individualised learning. The recent interdepartmental policy document *In good jobs* indicates a number of areas in which the application of multimedia and ICTs can facilitate the development of lifelong learning and support the employability agenda. First of all, it proposes that government and the social partners will provide an impulse to the development of distance and virtual learning in different sectors of the economy to prepare workers for the ICT skills demanded by the labour market and to utilise the efficiency of ICTs in the delivery of education and training. It argues that distance learning promises a 'just-in-time' and a 'just-in-place' opportunity to participate in learning particularly in the workplace, both in terms of initial and post-initial VET, and that this calls for the development of virtual learning environments.

The report refers to the development of virtual learning for job-seekers. In this regard, it refers to Foundation Website Network (*Stichting Website Nedwork*), which is a collective initiative by the social service departments of local authorities, job centres and a number of ICT firms.

This network enables job-seekers to follow courses online and to consult virtual databanks with vacant jobs. As part of the electronic highway promised in the NAP 2000, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment is currently examining the possibilities for a virtual training college (*Digitale Vakschool*), which will facilitate online access to interactive websites in support of worked-based learning. Further, in July 2000 OCenW announced that a review of the future of the Open University had resulted in a decision to transform it into a virtual university (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2000). A consortium including the OU, three universities and eight HBO institutions is now preparing a business plan. The objectives of the consortium are to develop virtual learning environments for application in regular higher education and for new target groups particularly in the higher education market for lifelong learning. To facilitate this transformation of the OU, the Minister for Education has recently withdrawn his original decision to cut the OU's budget due to the lower number of enrolled students.

The interdepartmental policy paper *In good jobs* of March 2000 also refers to the possibilities offered by the more traditional media such as **educational television** in support of lifelong learning. It suggests that educational television can also make a contribution to reaching out to those social groups excluded from both education and work, who have limited financial resources. The report points to the success of a number of experiments with regional and local educational television programmes run by ROCs. Reference is also made to the use of television to introduce people to personal computers with low-threshold programmes such as the BBC's series *Computers don't byte*. It also refers to the organisation by OCenW of the first adult learners' week in September 2000, which is based upon the successful formula already adopted in most other European countries.

An important issue on the development of virtual lifelong learning is the question of the development of a **digital divide** between those who have access to multimedia personal computers and the danger of social exclusion from lifelong learning delivered by ICTs. A recent report on digitalisation of the life-world (van Dijk et al., 2000) addressed these issues in Dutch society and its conclusions were relatively optimistic. It reported that there is indeed a delayed take-up of new digital media among single mothers, the low qualified, the unemployed, and the 65-plus, and suggested that the gap between the younger and older generations will probably widen in the short term. These current patterns of access and use were largely explained in terms of differences in income and level of education, and the report suggests that this involves the reproduction of existing inequalities rather than a new digital division in society. The report concludes that the gradual reduction in the costs of purchasing and using the new media will lead to a so-called 'trickle down' effect in the distribution of the new media from higher income to lower income groups. However, the report was critical of the overwhelming emphasis in government ICT policies upon major investments in formal education, especially in primary and secondary education, in order to disseminate ICT skills. It argued that the barriers for specific groups are characterised by income differences, educational level and lack of relevant social networks, and that policy should address these issues in promoting effective access through ICTs to lifelong learning.

### 1.6.8. Regional knowledge networks and learning regions

There has been an increasing government commitment in the Netherlands to a greater degree of intensity in the interaction between publicly-financed providers of vocational education and training with a variety of stakeholders in their direct environments to create learning regions in the form of regional knowledge networks. This was most clearly expressed in the HOOP 1999 and HOOP 2000 policy documents on higher education, and in the *Agenda Vocational and Adult Education* (*Agenda BVE*) relating to the ROCs in 1999. All three documents called for greater degrees of regional cooperation between the institutions for higher professional and secondary vocational education together with the provincial and municipal authorities, the social partners, the world of business, and a wider range of participants in provision of initial and post-initial education and training. Dutch universities were specifically exempted from this requirement on the grounds that they participate primarily in national and indeed international knowledge networks. The focus will be upon the role of ROCs in regional knowledge networks. The government's most recent proposals in this regard were announced in the policy paper *BVE on course* (*Koers BVE*) in September 2000.

While recognising the task of ROCs in the provision of secondary vocational education for young people, the point of departure in *Koers BVE* is that ROCs were established by the WEB to become autonomous and 'strong' institutions expected to develop strategic policies to meet the needs of diverse stakeholders in their regional environments. The government points out that ROCs now have a broader task than the provision of secondary vocational education as a preparation for integration in the labour market. It points out that knowledge must be constantly kept up to date in the knowledge economy and that there is a danger of social exclusion between those who do keep themselves up-to-date and those who do not, or are unable, to do so. The government is of the opinion that ROCs have to become important regional educational and training institutions supporting both the further development of the knowledge economy and the social integration of potentially excluded risk categories. *BVE on course* specifically refers to ROCs' broadly based centres of learning, which provide initial secondary vocational education, general adult education, citizenship courses for immigrants, and initial and post-initial training for both the employed and job-seekers. Further, ROCs are regarded as playing a significant role in creating a basis for the innovations demanded by lifelong learning such as dual trajectories, work-based learning, accreditation of prior learning, and the application of ICTs in the development of open learning.

Regional cooperation is seen, in the first place, in terms of the importance of the contracts between ROCs and municipalities for the buying-in by municipalities of the education and training provided by ROCs. This is particularly relevant to the responsibility of municipalities for the education and training of premature school-leavers, the provision of general adult education, and in particular the provision of citizenship courses for immigrants. Of some importance is the relative lack of success in promoting the transition from adult basic education and citizenship courses to vocational education and training for regional and local

labour markets. They are closely involved in the counselling and training of both unemployed youngsters and adults for their reintegration in the labour market.

In the second place, the government argues that ROCs can only be strong organisations when they are accessible to and serve the needs of an increasingly diverse public of both younger and adult participants. To this end, ROCs need to become 'open learning centres' which support the learning aspirations of diverse categories of participants. One aspect of creating a distinct profile in the region for ROCs will include improving open lines of communication with a more diverse cross-section of potential learners, particularly those already in work and job-seekers with low levels of qualification. One proposal in *BVE on course* involves the establishment of 'regional educational platforms' based upon the key role of municipalities in regional and local training markets. The Ministry of Education, the Association of Municipalities, and the BVE Council will investigate the implementation of this proposal jointly. An intensification of the information, guidance and counselling functions of ROCs in reaching out to these groups is also envisaged. Further, accessibility entails ROCs also providing courses in the evenings for those in work. Many ROCs conducted regional public information campaigns during the national week of learning in September 2000. This was also the case with their active participation at regional level during the national initiative for the vocational education week held in January 2001. As a week-long public information campaign, it focused on the key theme of vocational education and skills in the regions.

Thirdly, it is necessary to translate the national qualification structure into more specific regional profiles given the strong degree of differentiation and specialisation of regional labour markets. While the impact of globalisation leads to an emphasis on the knowledge economy, it is also necessary to recognise that regional economies and labour markets differ significantly within the Netherlands. This applies in particular at the first and second qualification levels, where ROC meet the specific needs of regional and local employers rather than the needs of the national labour market at the third and fourth qualification levels of more geographically mobile employees. With a view to facilitating the articulation between ROCs and regional labour markets, a number of 'techno-centres' were established during 2000. These techno-centres are intermediary organisations within a provisional framework, which finances the cooperation between vocational education institutions and regional businesses. They are intended to promote the active exploration of bottlenecks in regional and local labour markets, the exchange of knowledge between vocational education institutions and regional businesses, and encourage closer cooperation between ROCs and employers. This arrangement will be evaluated in 2002.

## 1.7. Social exclusion: age, gender and ethnic dimensions of lifelong learning

Given the emphasis on participation in the labour market and employability of the working population in the development of lifelong learning policies in the Netherlands, th

government's approach to social exclusion focuses very heavily on promoting participation in the labour market for important risk categories. For this reason, it is important to direct attention to those categories with a weak position in terms of active participation in employment. According to the 1999 report *Test of competitive potential 2000*, these categories not only include the low qualified employed and job-seekers without a start qualification, but also involve older workers, women and immigrants. An OECD report on social exclusion in 1999 also focused upon the need to reduce the barriers faced by these three latter categories in gaining access to the labour market (OECD, 1999c). The NAP 2000 placed even greater emphasis upon specific measures directed at three specific categories at risk of social exclusion due to their exclusion from the labour market and their low levels of education and training. These were respectively older workers, women and ethnic minorities.

In this section, attention will focus upon the specific positions of older workers, women and ethnic minorities as risk categories with regard to their participation in the labour market, improvement of their employability, and lifelong learning measures to reduce social exclusion.

### 1.7.1. Older workers

In the context of lifelong learning and the distribution of learning across the lifespan, it is significant that the NAPs indicate that the education and training needs of **older workers** are now returning to the Dutch policy agenda. Following a long period during which the systems for unemployment benefits, occupational disabilities and early retirement were systematically used to facilitate the exit of older workers from the labour market and the creation of employment opportunities for younger people, the shortage of qualified workers in the Netherlands now contributes to growing concern with extending the length of working life and the reintegration of those on occupational disability and unemployment benefits. This involves not only active measures to restrict early exit from the labour market but also reintroduces the issue of education and training for older workers. The NAP 1998, for example, refers to the need for greater participation by older employees, preventing their high dropout rates, and the need to teach them new skills to promote their employability. In the NAP 1999, it is recognised that active participation in the labour market by older people in the Netherlands is 'very low' in comparison with other EU Member States – 33% of the population between 55 and 64 years of age compared to averages of 50% to 60% elsewhere. The NAP 1999 proposes that 'significant emphasis is placed on creating the conditions (such as lifelong learning) under which it is attractive and possible to continue working. If labour participation of older people remains at its current low level, social-economic development will be jeopardised, as will an adequate financial base for the social system'.

This aspect of lifelong learning-throughout-life, rather than a preparation for a lifetime of learning in the initial phase of education, has been taken up in other Dutch reports. In March 2000, the Dutch cabinet's policy was set out in an interdepartmental report *In good jobs*. This addressed the trend since the early 1980s towards early exit from the Dutch labour

market. It argues the need to reverse this trend and to change the choice for older workers between work and non-work in the direction of a more gradual process of withdrawal from employment towards retirement at a later age. It effectively calls for the reintegration of older workers in the labour market, and the need to maintain their employability through lifelong education and training. The need for a greater awareness of generational questions in lifelong learning policies was previously addressed by the Scientific Council for Government Policy in its 1999 report on generation-conscious policy. This report was critical of the overwhelming emphasis placed upon initial education as a preparation for a lifetime of learning in the 1998 policy document *Lifelong learning: the Dutch initiative*. While the educational level achieved by successive generations in initial education has increasingly risen, the Scientific Council argued that it cannot be assumed that the current generation of older workers possess a level of initial education appropriate to the employability demands of the modern workplace or to meet the demands of effective social participation in the knowledge society. This viewpoint was also expressed in the OECD report *Education policy analysis 1999* (OECD, 1999b), which concluded that the 37% of Dutch adults without a basic qualification was high in comparative terms. Further, the Scientific Council report was critical of the emphasis in educational policy upon the application of an age criterion to limit financial entitlements to support participation in publicly financed education and training to those younger than 27 years of age and individual responsibility for investments beyond this age. In making a distinction between fundamental and continuing (vocational) education, the Scientific Council argued that government remains responsible for financing provision to meet the growing demand for fundamental education and the acquisition of core competences throughout the life-span in order to facilitate social participation by older citizens. Rather than an age-differentiated fundamental education policy, the report argued for an age-integrated policy geared to a more even distribution of entitlements to publicly financed fundamental education throughout the life-course.

With reference to the financing of continuing (vocational) education, the Scientific Council expressed support for the principle of individual responsibility, but also argued for a more radical extension of the self-financing of specialist vocational preparation in the initial phase of education beyond the level of the start qualification. Below the start qualification level, further measures are found to be necessary with regard to improving the employability of those in work and those seeking reintegration in the labour market. This calls for greater flexibility in the application of the highly segmented systems for financing training of the unemployed, sector training funds for the employed, occupational disability benefits, and new combinations of education and training with the maintenance of social benefits. As indicated in the governments' policy statement in March 2000, *In good jobs*, a start has since been made with the extension of the fiscal facilities for employers to encourage the training of older workers. In discussions with the social partners, the government is currently considering an experiment with the introduction of individual learning accounts in addition to the fiscal facilities already available to stimulate education and training for older workers without a start qualification. These individual learning accounts would comprise financial contributions from the government, employer and employee and are thought to provide a more direct personal incentive for individuals to participate in education and training in order to improve

their employability. Whether this will mitigate the limitations on training investments for older workers is open to question, and this leaves the generational distribution of entitlements to publicly financed education and training firmly on the lifelong learning agenda.

This strokes with ideas expressed in the recent Cedefop report *An age of learning: vocational training policy at the European level* (Bainbridge et al., 2000), that the continuous need to update knowledge and skills throughout life blurs the traditional distinctions between initial and post-initial (vocational) education and training. A policy for lifelong learning implies the opportunity for individuals to pursue education and training that is appropriate to different phases in their life-courses in order to enhance their competences, knowledge and skills. This necessarily involves the redesigning of the relationships between initial and post-initial education and training, between general education and vocational education and training, and between formal and non-formal learning. Rather than the age-defined breaks in generational entitlements to publicly financed education and training, which are characteristic of front-ended models of educational and training investments for life, lifelong learning policy demands a recurrent redistribution of individual entitlements to education and training across the life-span. This suggests that the division of responsibilities between government, employers and individuals for investments in lifelong learning must necessarily include a continuing government responsibility for publicly funded entitlements to the acquisition of core competences throughout life.

To address some of these issues regarding older workers, the Dutch government announced in March 2000 a package of measures in its policy document *Promotion of labour participation among older workers*. The measures were grouped around three main priorities. Firstly, the government announced that voluntary early retirement remains a right of the individual, but that this choice must be at the cost of the individuals concerned. This means that the favourable tax advantages at the basis of existing early retirement schemes will be removed in due course. A decision will be announced in 2001 following an evaluation of pension provisions. The government also favours the abolition of a standard age for compulsory retirement and the introduction of flexible retirement schemes. Secondly, the government has already announced the extension of the fiscal facilities for employers taking on specific categories of workers for older workers above 50 years of age. Favourable training measures for older workers are in discussion with the social partners. Thirdly, the government is considering withdrawing the exemption of the unemployed above 57 years of age from the duty to apply for jobs, when they have only recently become unemployed.

### 1.7.2. Women and employment

In addition to the problem of 'ageism', there also is a significant potential for 'genderism' in as a potential source of social exclusion in the Netherlands. There is a close relationship between employment policies, investments in education and training in relation to the comparatively low levels of participation by **women** in the Dutch labour market. Participation of Dutch women has increased significantly to 59%. Although the female employment rate

has risen rapidly during the last decade, it is still considerably lower than that for males at 78%. Further, Dutch women are overwhelmingly involved in part-time work especially in the child-caring period and in later life. Of working women in the Netherlands, 42% have part-time jobs of 20 hours or less per week compared to the European Union average of 20%, and only 5% express the desire to work longer.

There is a very significant phasing of female participation in active work across the life-span in relation to the child-bearing and child-caring phases. Full-time female employment is concentrated in the period after leaving full-time education and generally ceases with the birth of a first child at the comparatively late average age in European terms of 28 years. There is a significant period of low employability of women aged from 25 to 44, which results in internationally low levels of full-time participation in the labour market and indeed even in part-time employment. The reduction of women's caring tasks in the mid-life phase leads to the so-called 'reentry' to the labour market by the 'returners'. However, above the age of 55 there is a minimal participation by women in the active labour force. Increased female participation in the labour force during the 1990s has largely accounted for the rapid increase in part-time jobs in the Netherlands. As the 1999 NAP succinctly states: 'A large part of the flexibility of the Dutch employment model is due to the working pattern of women on stand-by contracts, part-time work, career breaks'. The same report notes that, 'the Dutch model is well-known for the flexibility part-time work offers, but as long as this is seen as the preserve of women, the gulf between women and men in the labour force will not get any smaller'. It also argued, moreover, that, 'there are various reasons for increasing the scope for part-time working: to improve the scope for combining paid work with other responsibilities; to create more employment in terms of the numbers of people employed; to combat concealed unemployment; to improve the distribution of work and caring responsibilities between men and women; and to make companies more flexible'.

This not only results in a sex-based division of the labour market and the gendered distribution of caring tasks in the home, it also contributes to a potentially significant gender-bias in the distribution of education and training investments. It is generally the case that those in part-time employment, and most certainly those on standby, flexible and part-time contracts, can make fewer claims upon the rights to education and training which are available to those in full-time employment or with permanent contracts under the terms of collective labour agreements. Furthermore, women, and in particular part-time women workers, are employed in exactly those sectors - such as the administrative and distributive services, health and care services - where the arrangements for education and training of employees are least developed. Given the gender bias in employment patterns, it is significant that Dutch government policy continues to concentrate on easing the problems of women in seeking to cope with the combination of employment and caring, and increasingly the task of enhancing their employability. Efforts to encourage part-time work by men have so far proved to be ineffective despite the government's declared commitment to redistribute work and care between men and women.

The most vigorous measures to promote a redistribution of work and caring have been directed at single parents – the euphemism for unskilled women with children on social benefits. While married couples can transfer the tax allowance of a non-working mother to reduce the working-partner's tax liability, single mothers, who until recently did not have the responsibility to look for work while they had school-aged children, are now required to seek employment or engage in vocational training in order to maintain their social benefits when their children reach the school-age of five years. This is part of the government's strategy to 'promote the outflow from long-term benefit dependency' in the words of the NAP 1999. Of some significance in this regard was a recent government decision to permit individuals on social benefit and without a duty to seek work – in particular single mothers with children under five - to enrol in education courses, which are not regarded as vocational preparation. The decision means that they will now be able to enrol in higher education while retaining their rights to social benefits. Others on social benefits but with a duty to seek work will be allowed to enroll in education and training for a period of two years providing the course followed is labour market oriented. This decision follows a ruling by the Central Appeals Council and the High Court in favour of a single mother who was deprived of social benefits because she was enrolled as a university student. Consideration of greater flexibility in combining education and training with the maintenance of social benefits was announced in the March 2000 interdepartmental policy document *In good jobs*.

On the basis of the action plan *In good jobs*, announced mid-2000, and the NAP 2000, the following specific measures are pertinent to the policy priority of promoting greater levels of participation by women in the Dutch labour market. The reservation must be expressed, however, that such measures apply to the work force as a whole although they may be particularly beneficial to women. Of no little significance is the Career Breaks Funding Act of 1998, which allows employees to take a break for caring purposes or for the purposes of education and training. Given the significant participation by Dutch women in part-time employment on short-term contracts, the Flexibility and Security Act of 1999 ensures that those employed on temporary contracts, for example with employment agencies, have the right to a permanent contract of employment after a given period of employment. A similar effect will arise from the Working Hours Adjustment Act which guarantees part-time employees the same rights as those in full-time employment without changes to their contract of employment and entitlements to pension rights, etc. In September 1999, a Leave-Saving Bill, also mentioned above, was presented to parliament which will enable employees to allocate 10% of their annual income, or the equivalent in working hours, to finance a period of leave for the purposes, for example, of educational leave. Often seen as a contribution to the rights of women to engage in paid emp[illegible]yment is the expansion of financial provisions for childcare facilities. In many cases the[illegible]arrangements do not facilitate the provision of childcare but create fiscal facilities either for employers who provide childcare facilities or for individuals to deduct the costs of childcare from their individual tax burden. The government's announcement of a long-term policy on emancipation in March 2000 retained, moreover, the significant distinction between employees with 'caring responsibilities' as opposed to those who are regarded as the 'breadwinner' for a family. This indicates a continuation of policies based upon the systematic distinction between men and women in

terms of the combination of caring and working tasks as being directed at women rather than men. Few of these measures are actually directed at creating women's rights to education and training on an equal basis across the life-span in terms of entitlements to lifelong learning.

### 1.7.3. Ethnic minorities

In addition to the diversity in age-based and gender-based participation in both the labour market and education and training, ethnic diversity is an increasingly significant feature in Dutch society. The question of cultural diversity in Dutch society and the lower levels of participation by **ethnic minorities** in the labour market stems from the influx of immigrants in three periods: (a) the so-called 'guest workers' particularly from Turkey and Morocco in the 1960s and 1970s; (b) the 'commonwealth citizens' from Suriname since 1975 and more recently the Antilles; and (c) the current stream of refugees. At the present-time ethnic minority immigrants comprise 8.6% of the Dutch population with major concentrations in the larger cities while a similar percentage of immigrants come from so-called 'western countries'. With total immigrants comprising 17.3% of the total population, the Netherlands is in practice a multicultural society. Levels of unemployment among ethnic minorities is high compared to the indigenous Dutch population, and are higher in comparative terms according to the report *Test of competitive potential 2000*. In 1998, 16% of ethnic minorities were unemployed compared to 4% of the indigenous Dutch population. Among non-ethnic immigrants - from EU countries, the United States, etc. - the unemployment rate was 7%. In itself this was a marked improvement compared to 1994 when the level of unemployment was 26%. None the less, levels of unemployment remain seriously high among the 15 to 24 age group and range from 23% for Turks, Surinamers and Moroccans to 40% for other minorities (Social and Economic Plan Office, 1999).

Many of the ethnic minorities' problems in securing employment are attributed in official policy statements to their relatively low levels of education, early dropout from school, lack of a start qualification, and language difficulties. Of 15 to 19 year-old Turks and Moroccans, more than 50% leave school early without any qualification. None the less, overall participation in education by the younger generation of ethnic minorities has increased significantly in recent years with 80% to 90% of 15 to 19 year-olds involved in some form of full-time education or training, while 40% of Turks and Moroccans between 15 and 24 have acquired a secondary vocational education diploma (MBO). However, their level of participation in full-time education in the 20 to 24 age group is significantly lower at 20% compared with the indigenous population at 40%. There are also significant differences in educational achievement between the younger and older generations of immigrants. Of the Turks and Moroccans aged from 40 to 64, only 10% have an MBO or higher level diploma. An additional problem is that well-qualified immigrants frequently fail to secure employment at an appropriate level.

Since the early 1990s, Dutch government policy towards the integration of immigrants has increasingly focused upon promoting their participation in employment combined with

specific education and training measures. This means that integration policy and labour market policies for immigrants are very intimately related which also has consequences on education and training measures. Labour market policy towards ethnic minorities has been primarily based upon application of the standard measures directed at the unemployed in general where the labour mediation service plays a key role. General measures to improve job opportunities for ethnic minorities have included a series of voluntary agreements between government and the employers' organisations. These seek to ensure recruitment of agreed quotas of immigrants, preventing discrimination in recruitment and promoting equal opportunities, while the social partners are increasingly involved in the development of specific measures within different economic sectors. More specific measures have been directed at 'newcomers', refugees, women and youngsters, and there is also increasing recognition of the significant differences between immigrant groups. Labour-market related policy has increasingly recognised the problems deriving from the low qualification levels of many immigrants and now includes more specific education and training measures to raise their qualification levels – in terms of both general and work-related competences – and improve their employability.

Of no little significance in terms of the acquisition of basic competences is the 1998 Citizenship for Newcomers Act (*Wet inburgering nieuwkomers*). This requires new immigrants to participate in courses intended to provide them with an introduction to Dutch society and culture, basic survival skills, and to acquire the Dutch language. More recently, as reported in the NAP 2000, the opportunity has been created in 42 local authorities for 'oldcomers' to participate in these courses on a voluntary basis where the objectives include acquisition of the Dutch language and the strengthening of their effectiveness as parents. Local authorities are responsible for the organization of participation in these courses provided by ROCs. These latter institutions are also responsible, since the WEB law of 1996, for the organisation of literacy courses for the illiterate in adult basic education and the provision of general adult secondary education (VAVO). Although originally intended for the Dutch population as a whole, the majority of participants in these courses are currently from ethnic minorities (Algemene Rekenkamer, 2000).

The government's policy document in 1998 (Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, 1998b), was followed in 1999 with a series of policy measures which were intended to cut by 50% the differences in unemployment between the ethnic minorities and the indigenous population to a level of 10%. It also called for more differentiated measures for the diverse categories of immigrants. In its advisory report in early 2000 (Social-economic Council, 2000b), the SER pointed to the importance of preventing premature school leaving without a start qualification, but it also indicated the significant role played by secondary vocational education in securing basic qualifications for ethnic minorities. To this end, it pointed to the need to strengthen the awareness of cultural diversity in the work of ROCs with students from ethnic minorities. It also argued the need for a significant investment in more flexible education and training measures on a broad front to raise the qualification levels and thus the employability of both the employed and job-seekers without a start qualification. In the spring 2000 consultation round with the social partners, this led to agreements on the promotion of

dual trajectories combining education and work for job-seekers, more flexible combinations of work and participation in citizenship courses, and more systematic preparation for employment during and after citizenship courses. These measures, together with the improvement of the quality and effectiveness of citizenship courses as a whole, are currently under review by the Task Force on Citizenship (*Taskforce Inburgering*).

With regard to the employability agenda, the government's current policy priorities towards immigrants were announced in the interdepartmental policy document *In good jobs*. This calls for additional tailor-made measures to raise the Dutch language competences of 'oldcomers', especially the unemployed, work-based language courses for the employed, and the development of dual trajectories in higher education for well-educated refugees. The most recent government policy document on integration policy, *Arbeidsmarktbeleid voor etnische minderheden 2000-2003 - Labour market policy for ethnic minorities 2000-03* (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2000), reports on progress made to date on labour market policy and education and training measures.

### 1.7.4. Life-course perspectives

Consideration of the often complex interactions between the generation, gender and cultural diversity dimensions of **lifelong learning within a life-course perspective** have been explored in recent reports from advisory committees. In its definitive report in December 1999 on promoting labour participation by the elderly, the SER argued for the normalisation of labour market participation up to 60 years of age and for a significant increase above this age (Social-economic Council, 1999b). To this end, it advised the reversal of arrangements which have encouraged the norm of early exit from the labour market, the development of older-worker-friendly personnel policies in firms, and improved incentives for older workers. It viewed the need for increased levels of investment by firms in the education and training of older workers as a key priority. Indeed, it proposed that as much should be invested in older workers as in younger workers. This led the SER to recommend that the social partners examine the possibilities of utilising the sectoral training funds more effectively to improve the employability of older workers, special attention be given to education and training in small and medium-sized firms, and development of a tax incentive for educational leave.

In March 2000, the Scientific Committee for Government Policy published a study on the life-courses of Dutch adults born between 1900 and 1970 (Liefbroer et al., 2000). The report points to the very significant changes in the life-courses of different generations and focuses on the changing relationships between participation in family life, relationships, work and education across the life-span. On the one hand, it points to the current high average levels of educational achievements by women which are not reflected in their participation in full-time work and the still dominant pattern of combining part-time work and caring in the mid-life phase. In this regard, however, the report points to the development of significant differences in labour market participation of high-qualified and low-qualified women. While high-qualified women increasingly combine work with caring for children, low-qualified women

maintain 'traditional' patterns of early and often permanent exit from the labour market. Part-time employment by men is now concentrated in the post-50 year period as preparation for retirement, while a significant number of the older generation, both men and women, are engaged in giving meaning to their social engagement in a long post-retirement period. In both cases there is an underutilisation of education and training with negative consequences for employability. The report concludes that government policy inadequately responds to the fundamental changes in life-courses, which in particular affect women and older people. With regard to older people, the report argues that age-related criteria – that is to say 'ageism' - in legislation and regulations lead to the social exclusion of older people from activities – including participation in work - in which their knowledge and experience could be of great value.

In a draft advisory report published in July 2000, the SER argues the need for a life-course perspective as the basis of an emancipation policy (Social-economic Council, 2000a). Such policy would recognise the growing diversity in life-courses, more complex combinations of working and caring for both men and women, and the promotion of employability in all phases of working life. The report expresses criticism with regard to the current emphasis in policy – the so-called 'combination model' –that concentrates on the combination of work and caring during the child-caring period and is overly focused upon women as carers. The report proposes that greater participation by women in the labour market – the government target for 2010 is 65% compared to 51% in 1999 - implies that both women and men must be able to realise their references for combining work and caring. The report argues that this will necessarily involve greater variation in individual patterns of participation in the labour market across the life-span and will lead to more diversity. It suggests, furthermore, that caring is not the only reason why individuals prefer to reduce their involvement in work or take a career break, and it refers specifically to participation in education and training as part of lifelong learning. Consequently the SER proposes that emancipation policy must make it possible for individuals to enhance their employability through education and training in all phases of working life. It calls upon the government to introduce financial measures to ensure that individuals have access to the appropriate entitlements to facilitate variable work patterns and career breaks throughout working life as part of lifelong learning.

A number of recent government and advisory committee reports refer to the specific problems of women with regard to combining work, caring and education and training in different phases of the life-course. In its draft report on emancipation policy referred to above, the SER identifies three groups of women whose specific situations demand particular attention: younger employed women, poorly educated women and women from ethnic minorities. While the educational achievements of young women increasingly matches that of young men, there are recent indications that their active participation in the labour market is associated with a worryingly high level of early exit to the occupational disability system. With regard to poorly educated women the SER argues that they tend to lead the most traditional pattern of living which involves a short period of low-paid unskilled work followed by a more or less permanent withdrawal from the labour market with the birth of the first child. Thirdly, with regard to immigrant women, the report refers in particular to low

levels of participation in the labour market by poorly educated Turkish and Moroccan women. Increasing attention for the diversity among women from ethnic minorities stems from the 1999 report by the Social and Cultural Plan Office (Hooghiemstra et al., 1999). This report concluded that there are significant differences in the labour market participation by immigrant women despite an upward trend in recent years. It refers not only to the problems of combining work and caring for these mainly low-educated women, but also to the cultural factors in family life, variations in family structures, and differences in migration patterns. The report proposed that policy measures, including the provision of education and training facilities, must take account of such differences between ethnic minority women with special reference to non-participation by single women, problems of single-parent families, their lack of language skills, and their involvement largely in unskilled work. Such an approach was supported by the SER advisory report in 2000 on the promotion of labour market participation by ethic minorities. In its recent policy document, the government has announced an additional subsidy for women's technical schools (*Vrouwenvakscholen*) which have developed highly successful education and training trajectories for ethnic minority women to the labour market (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2000). Further, a committee of investigation will be established to examine best practices in this area.

## 1.8. Conclusion: employability as a 'fragile policy discourse'

Since the mid-1990s, lifelong learning has clearly emerged as a key item on the policy agenda of education and training in the Netherlands. In this first section, attention has been devoted to contributions from a variety of stakeholders in the emerging policy debate and development of policy towards lifelong learning. This has focused upon the basic dynamics in the policy-formation process with particular reference to the positions taken by different government departments, contributions of government advisory committees and consultation of the social partners. It has involved exploration of policy to identify the dominant elements which frame and steer consideration of the choice of policy instruments and specific policy measures. In terms of the narrative themes explored, it is possible to identify the major components of current policy.

With regard to the **policy environment** in which policy-formation is embedded, lifelong learning is above all legitimated by concerns with maintaining the competitiveness of the Dutch economy and dealing with current economic developments in the labour market. In particular, lifelong learning is overwhelmingly viewed within the perspective of the government's commitment to transforming the Dutch economy into a knowledge-based and high-skill economy. This has contributed to an emphasis upon the need for a well-educated workforce, maintaining the employability of workers through continuous updating of knowledge and skills, and a workforce which is both responsible for and able to manage its own employability. It is a striking feature that the current discussion on lifelong learning in the Netherlands is predominantly conducted in terms of the tight labour market, shortages of skilled workers, the need for older workers to remain longer at work, and the (re-)integration

of women, low-skilled men and ethnic minorities into the labour market. It is within this policy environment that lifelong learning has now become an important political priority.

In terms of the explicit presence of **lifelong learning in government policy**, it is significant that strategic policy perspectives, preferences for policy instruments and concrete policy measures are argued in terms of labour market and employability considerations. The emphasis in macro policy upon the labour market has strengthened the key role of initial and post-initial vocational education and training as the priority instruments to implement lifelong learning in the Netherlands. Successive policy papers, advisory reports and the contribution of the social partners all focus on the need to develop a flexible system of initial and post-initial vocational education and training which is responsive to the changing demands of the labour market and the enhancement of employability. In this regard specific emphasis is placed upon the contribution of lifelong learning in creating opportunities for those without a basic qualification to improve their personal employability and entry to the labour market. On the one hand, this focuses on reducing the number of young people, especially those from ethnic minorities, who prematurely leave full-time initial secondary general and vocational education without a start qualification. On the other hand, increasing attention is given to providing post-initial vocational education and training for both the employed and job-seekers who do not possess a basic qualification. Such measures focus in particular upon the labour reserve among older workers, women and ethnic minorities. There is, furthermore, a clear priority for the development of flexible trajectories that combine education and training with work experience in dual trajectories together with the strengthening of work-based learning.

With reference to the **coordination of lifelong learning policies**, there have been significant developments in the Netherlands towards the involvement of more diverse policy communities in the policy-formation process at government level. Driven by the consensus on lifelong learning and the employability agenda, this has given rise since the formation of the coalition government in mid-1998 to a cross-departmental approach at government level with regard to both strategic policy and the implementation of specific measures to promote lifelong learning. This has led to an interdepartmental framework for the coordination of policies in the respective spheres of the educational system, the economy and innovation, social security and employment insofar as they impact upon creating the conditions for the realisation of lifelong learning in relation to the labour market. Given the emergence of the employability agenda as the common basis for the development of lifelong learning policies, responsibility for the choice of policy instruments and implementation of specific policy measures is increasingly shared by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCenW), the Ministry of Economic Affairs (*Ministerie van Economische Zaken*) and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (*Ministerie van Social Zaken en Werkgelegenheid*). In terms of implementation of specific measures, this pattern of shared responsibility necessarily involves other policy communities at the level of decentralised implementation such as the social partners, the labour arbitration system, the municipalities and the autonomous educational institutions for secondary and higher vocational education.

In terms of the **involvement of stakeholders** in the policy-formation process, the Netherlands is characterised by the significant degree to which the social partners are systematically involved in the consultative process of lifelong learning policies. This is a consequence of the consensus that lifelong learning is primarily concerned with labour market and employability issues. Indeed there is an explicit agreement that both the development of policy and the implementation of policy measures are based upon systematic consultation between the government and the social partners. This is not only manifested in the structure of systematic consultation, but also in mutual agreements about the shared but distinctive responsibilities of both government and the social partners for investments in lifelong learning. In practice, this means that the government is responsible for the acquisition of start in initial secondary and higher education and training, while the social partners are responsible for the acquisition of basic qualifications through post-initial vocational education and training in the workplace.

As far as **financial arrangements for lifelong learning** are concerned, the Dutch situation is characterised by the explicit division of responsibilities for investments in education and learning between the government, the social partners and individual learners. The government is responsible for the public funding of the provision of initial education and training to the level of acquiring a start qualification and entry into the labour market. It also assumes responsibility for stimulating post-initial education and training for those adults who do not possess a basic qualification. The social partners and individual learners are responsible respectively for the funding of post-initial education and training beyond the level of the start qualification. In terms of policy instruments, there is a clear preference in post-initial education and training for cooperation between the social partners to stimulate lifelong learning through collective labour agreements and the sectoral education and training funds. With regard to priority groups, the Dutch government gives priority to fiscal measures to stimulate both employers and employees to invest in education and training, while serious consideration is currently given to the introduction of individual learning accounts for those without a basic qualification.

In terms of relationships between **initial and post-initial education and training** in the context of lifelong learning, there is a dominant tendency in Dutch government policy 'to think policy' in terms of a front-ended model of initial education and training. This is expressed in terms of the preparation of the younger generation for 'a lifetime of learning', an emphasis on learning to learn, and promotion of a culture of lifelong learning. The adaptation of existing arrangements for post-initial education and training in later life for workers, job-seekers and returnees is regarded as an additional injection to meet current pressures in the labour market. As such, Dutch policy is hesitant to address the reworking of traditional distinctions between initial and post-initial education and training. Despite emphasis placed on the knowledge economy, Dutch government policies have not as yet recog ed that the increasing lack of transparency in the distinction between initial and post-initial education and training throughout working life calls for a fundamental reconsideration of the division of the respective responsibilities of government, the social partners and individuals for investments in initial and post initial education and training. This means that government policy is not addressing the need for a redesigned architecture of flexible points of exit and reentry

between initial and post-initial education and training. Given the expectation of the requirement to continue learning throughout an extended working life, this is pertinent to the renegotiation of the entitlements of lifelong learners to publicly financed provision of education and training.

With regard to the relationship between **formal and non-formal learning**, there are indications of growing recognition in government policy that the realisation of lifelong learning calls for more flexible and diverse learning environments. This primarily involves measures to promote more flexible pathways through the initial education and training system and in particular the possibility of unbroken and shorter transitions from secondary to higher vocational education. There are also indications of a willingness to consider greater diversity in transition from initial education and training into work, and from work back into post-initial education and training. In current Dutch government policy there are two major priorities in this regard. On the one-hand, there is considerable emphasis in both the initial and post-initial education and training sectors on the development of flexible learning trajectories involving dual routes combining formal and work-based learning. On the other hand, there is now a clear commitment to develop of mechanisms for accreditation of prior learning and to recognise competences acquired in non-formal worked-based learning. Further, a number of initiatives have been announced which will enhance the role of ICTs in supporting non-formal open learning environments both in and outside the workplace.

Lifelong learning policies must be examined in terms of their contributions to the realisation of: (a) lifelong learning within a life-course perspective, and (b) life-wide learning involving variable patterns of involvement in learning, work, caring, and other forms of social participation. In both respects, it is appropriate to pose some questions on the priorities identified in the development of lifelong learning policies in the Netherlands.

With reference to **lifelong learning**, it is significant that Dutch policy is still largely formulated in terms of an understanding of the traditional life-course, which involves the phases of preparation in initial education, engagement in active employment, and a phase of withdrawal from work into retirement. This approach is based, however, on empirically suspect assumptions about the 'standard biography' and is primarily focused on the phase of active involvement in work. It ignores the increasingly pluralistic reality of the differentiation in life-courses in late modern societies and the shifting patterns of active involvement in learning, work, caring and other forms of social participation in the life-courses of both men and women. The question is whether government and the social partners adequately understand the full implications of demographic change towards a 'greying society', the demands of the knowledge society, and the necessity of a life-course perspective on investments in education and training throughout life rather than for a life-time of work.

This leads to lack of consideration of issues concerning the distribution of entitlements to the publicly-financed provision of education and training to acquire core competences irrespective of age, gender and ethnicity. Lifelong learning requires more than the creation of opportunities for workers to update their knowledge and skills in relation to economic

developments in the labour market in general and needs of employers in particular. Given the emphasis in Dutch government policy on lifelong learning in relation to labour market requirements and employability, it would be more appropriate to move towards a fundamental integration of policy measures in the sphere of education and training together with those relating to working life and social security. This demands, however, a life-course perspective on policy which questions the current distribution of both public and private investments in initial and post-initial education throughout working life between the generations, men and women and ethnic minorities. As such, this is an argument in favour of an age-integrated rather than an age-differentiated distribution of publicly-financed educational opportunities. The question is whether the government, employers, employees and individuals not engaged in work are either aware of and prepared to accept such a fundamental re-arrangement of both collective and individual rights to and responsibilities for investments in learning and work across the life-span.

With respect to **life-wide learning**, current policy towards lifelong learning in the Netherlands is focused on the facilitation of combinations of working and learning, and in some measure towards of working and caring in the family. However, such policies are still predominantly formulated combinations in terms of the caring responsibilities of women in combination with work and learning in the specific phase of their lives when working and caring puts pressure upon them as women. Within the context of this report, the research undertaken has not explored the broader issues of social participation beyond the workplace and the family, and it has not addressed the 'wider benefits of learning'. These other forms of participation in civil society involve the competences to act as a citizen in local, regional and national communities, let alone participation in a European society of knowledge, learning, working, caring and citizenship. The current approach to lifelong learning policies in the Netherlands inhibits a broader perspective on the 'wider benefits of learning' in terms of the returns to individuals, organisations, communities and society at large. For this reason alone, it is appropriate to question the overwhelming dominance of individual 'performance' in the labour market as the dominant legitimation of lifelong learning within the framework of the employability agenda.

The emphasis in Dutch policy upon employability as individual economic 'performance' can mean, moreover, that lifelong learning policies in the Netherlands are oversensitive to economic developments in the labour market and are thus subjected to short-term shifts in priorities. The employability agenda is dominated by short-term economic factors that provide little perspective on learning in relation to other forms of social participation and the construction of non-work identities. The lifelong learning agenda in the Netherlands constructs the lifelong learner as a 'permanently learning subject', who is ordained to be the self-directed entrepreneur of his or her personal employability in a 'risk society'. This constitutes a potentially 'fragile' construction of the dominant policy discourse about lifelong learning in the knowledge society. Empirical data reported in later sections of this country study point to the reality of engagements in vocational education and training and education for personal development as investments in lifelong learning, which are not limited to the demands of the workplace and employability. This suggests that lifelong learners - the

'ultimate stakeholders in a learning society' - do not construct their learning efforts solely within the confines of the employability agenda. In the learning society, learners are 'do-it-yourself enthusiasists' who manage their learning and their lives in a manner meaningful to them. Vocational education and training plays a vital role in the realisation of lifelong learning, but it is neither the beginning nor the end of a 'lifetime of learning'.

# 2. The pedagogical design of lifelong learning

## 2.1. Impact of lifelong learning in regular VET curricula

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### 2.1.1. Introduction

To what extent are lifelong learning strategies being implemented in vocational education and training in the Netherlands? In seeking to answer this question, Section 2.1 focuses on the developments in initial secondary vocational education and training (*Middelbaar Beroepsonderwijs* - MBO) together with higher professional education (*Hoger Beroepsonderwijs* - HBO).

The concept of lifelong learning has led to increased attention on accessibility of initial vocational and professional education in Dutch government policy more than to the development of concepts for a rearrangement of the balance between initial and post-initial education. The government considers itself primarily responsible for providing a good basis for lifelong learning in initial education. Individuals are subsequently responsible for recognising the importance of lifelong learning and maintaining their own competences. From this perspective, the government identifies two roles for itself: (a) guaranteeing a high quality and transparent range of initial vocational qualifications, which can form a basis for lifelong learning, and, (b) creating conditions that facilitate lifelong learning. For example, this involves tax deductibility of study costs for individuals and training costs for companies.

In the view of government, adult individuals as critical consumers make their own choices and determine themselves what is the best way to learn. Individuals should be educated to be such critical consumers. Strengthening the position of those demanding education, also in initial vocational education and training, is an important priority for government. Everyone should (learn to) judge which ways of learning and content fit best with their own wishes and capacities.

With reference to government-funded institutions for education and training, government has no explicit role in providing training for adults. The institutions can achieve a prominent place on the learning market, if their products are of good quality (Education Inspectorate, 1999, p. 13). However, in this 'learning market' these institutions are only one of the many providers from which the educational consumer may choose. Especially higher professional education (HBO) has seen a relatively strong growth in the provision of (longer) post-initial courses for those who want to update their professional knowledge and skills, although it remains only a small part of total provision.

Government-funded institutions for initial education and training could position themselves in this market for adult education in terms of their wide and varied range of initial qualifications and in terms of organising short demand-led training courses.

The conclusion is that in the Dutch situation the concept of lifelong learning can impact upon initial education and training in two ways: (a) by contributing to the preparation of young participants for lifelong learning, and, (b) by making initial qualifications accessible to adults. In this part of the report, the accessibility of initial qualifications for adults is solely defined in educational terms: the conditions of entry and the design of the curriculum. Of course accessibility is also dependent on financial conditions, such as financial aid in meeting study costs. However, these points will not be considered here since we are dealing solely with the question to what degree the content of curricula is adapted to the specific needs of adult learners. The contribution of initial vocational education and training to lifelong learning can thus be divided into four concrete questions:

(a) how can qualifications in initial vocational education be made more accessible to adults by making it possible to combine initial and post-initial education and training?
(b) to what extent are possibilities being created to make initial qualifications accessible to adults?
(c) how is the view of lifelong learning being incorporated into the content of vocational education?
(d) how is the view of lifelong learning being incorporated into the design of curricula?

### 2.1.2. Connections between initial vocational education and post-initial learning

#### *2.1.2.1. Connections in initial vocational education (MBO)*

Initial vocational education is offered at four levels within the national qualification system. In the Netherlands an initial qualification of at least the second level of MBO is seen as the necessary basis for lifelong learning and work. By defining a minimum level as a basis for lifelong learning and work in the MBO field, this education plays an important role in government policy for lifelong learning. In view of the traditionally high dropout rate in MBO (Polder et al., 1999, p.10), government gives high priority to fighting this phenomenon. Also the government, together with social partners, is involved in creating experimental provisions that enable working people to achieve a qualification at this second level.

In what way could adults achieve such a qualification? Through accreditation of competences acquired elsewhere, a link is made between initial and post-initial learning. Through accreditation of prior learning (APL) post-initial learning and working experiences can be recognised for a qualification at secondary level. Recognition of post-initial learning and work experience in the perspective of an MBO qualification can take different forms:

- recognition of prior experience when entering an MBO course;
- equivalence of certificates from providers of post-initial courses and training to MBO certificates;
- offering possibilities to working people to achieve an MBO qualification entirely in their work environment.

These options are rarely used in the Netherlands (Doets et al., 2000). Various policy documents point to the importance of APL (Education Inspectorate, 1999, p. 17; Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2000a), but the development and implementation of APL procedures remains primarily the responsibility of educational providers. These appear to take little initiative. Relatively speaking most use is made of the first option to qualify workers: the recognition of prior experiences when entering an MBO course. APL is generally set up to offer workers tailor-made curricula within regular education. The recognition of previously acquired competences takes the form of testing and examining these prior experiences. In this perspective APL is a particular form of examining (partial) qualifications, belonging to a complete curriculum. Central to this is the offering of possibilities to recognise and value relevant qualities and qualifications, other than those attained through school-based examination, in entrance to MBO courses. But even in this form little use is being made of APL in the year 2000. In many institutions APL has barely taken hold. There is a certain interest, but many projects are still in the start-up phase. A major obstacle is the difference in criteria for competences between the standards that are part of the national qualification structure and those indicators, which are considered relevant by business. Also the complexity and attachment to subject matter of many APL testing procedures is reported to be a barrier to wider usage (Doets et al., 2000).

The second option, equating certificates from providers of post-initial courses and training to MBO certificates, which would thus automatically give the right to partial certificates, is used even less. Recently, a large number of diplomas and certificates for military personnel from the Ministry of Defence have been equated to partial certificates from the qualification structure. This equation is mainly aimed at increasing the added value to society of military diplomas and certificates. This equivalence makes it possible to raise the civil effect of the military diplomas. Experts in the area of APL assume that adults are regularly granted exemptions upon enrolment in vocational courses adults, this being based upon qualifications already acquired. These are not, however, structural but are ad hoc agreements between those involved.

The third option, offering possibilities to working people to attain a recognised qualification entirely within the workplace, is also rare. The Dutch system of MBO offers the possibility to attain a qualification in two equal educational trajectories. The difference between these two curricula comes down to the ratio between learning at school and in working practice. For example, the worked-based vocational training trajectory (*beroepsbegeleidende leerweg - bbl*) should have a workplace part of at least 60% of study time. This could be as much as 100%. Although this possibility exists formally, it has hardly been used up to now. This was pointed out recently when the possibility of an entirely workplace-oriented trajectory was conceived

as an alternative for young people who had dropped out of school prematurely (Cabinet response to MDW report, June 2000). But apart from young people who have recently dropped out of vocational training, this trajectory could also be relevant to others who do not have a qualification at the desired secondary level. Until now all trajectories for dropouts, young people with learning difficulties and working adults have comprised combinations of school-based and work-based learning. The idea that a qualification can be entirely acquired through work-based learning is new in the Netherlands.

#### *2.1.2.2. Connections in higher professional education (HBO)*

Higher professional education (HBO) does not play a prominent role in government policy towards lifelong learning, except for strengthening its allocation function for the benefit of higher positions in the labour market, which are important to the knowledge intensification of the economy. This policy takes the form, for example, of increasing the accessibility of existing curricula and stimulating the development of learning/working curricula, which are designed to bring students from higher professional education into contact with medium and small-sized businesses, that so far have employed few people with higher professional degrees. In this perspective, the improvement of connections and mutual adjustment between MBO and HBO are also important because it widens the access to high professional qualifications. Easing the transfer from MBO to HBO is a recent policy change. Until two years ago, MBO and HBO were regarded as two distinct paths to the labour market. According to the previous Minister for Education pupils in general secondary education had to make a choice between MBO and HBO in preparing themselves for the labour market. Both general secondary education and MBO are now equal paths to HBO. However, there is no government policy, as in MBO, which is aimed at creating ways of making HBO qualifications accessible to working people.

Increasing accessibility of HBO qualifications can take place through recognition of working experience and MBO diplomas and certificates and post-initial education. Especially cooperation with MBO has grown strongly recently. Most connections between MBO and HBO arise (bilaterally) at the initiative of the institutions involved. Initiatives aimed at increasing accessibility of HBO qualifications to adults are much less frequent. In the recent higher education and research plan, HOOP 2000 (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 1999a, p.77), the introduction of APL procedures is argued for, but it is left to the institutions actually to implement these procedures. In practice, entry conditions for HBO are defined in terms of formal diplomas of traditional preliminary education and APL is almost non-existent (Hake et al., 1999, p.63).

Another channel for offering recognised initial qualifications is the provision of commercial courses by HBO institutions. However, these market-oriented courses are not necessarily related to the range of initial professional courses in HBO. There is little evidence of the development of systematic structures of recurrent learning which impact upon both initial and post-initial higher education. This gives rise to the problematic relationships and tensions

between 'regular' initial higher education and the development of post-initial professional updating as a vital part of lifelong learning (Hake et al., 1999, p.64).

### 2.1.3. Accessibility of professional qualifications for adults

#### *2.1.3.1. Accessibility of secondary education and training qualifications for adults*

The concept report of the monitor BVE 1998/99, a yearly report of the results of the MBO and adult education sector, reports that awareness regarding the access to formal qualifications for adults is increasing. There is also a slight increase in the number of adults older than 25 years of age participating in MBO, from 0% in 1983/84 to 7.5% in1997/98 (Vrieze et al., 2000, p. 45). By offering APL procedures, MBO qualifications could become accessible to an even broader group of adults. Recognition of their previous experience and offering possibilities to combine learning and working reaches out to the characteristics of adult learners. Recent research demonstrates that despite the fact that both adult general education and MBO courses are provided by ROCs this has had little or no effect on the transfer by adults from adult general education to MBO courses (Doets et al., 2000).

As has been mentioned, the structural offering of APL by government financed MBO institutions (ROCs) is rare. The only form in which ROCs offer APL is in the framework of demand-led provision of formal qualifying curricula for employees of companies and other organisations. ROCs are allowed to have profit-based contract learning agreements with companies. Depending on the wishes of companies these agreements may lead to a MBO (partial) qualification or just tailor-made training for company needs. Non-subsidised commercial providers, who can also educate to recognised secondary-level qualifications, take much more account of experience and abilities of adults. Courses offered by commercial providers can be followed in correspondence form, with the help of ICT facilities and evening classes. Figures pertaining to the degree to which these are being used are not available.

#### *2.1.3.2. Accessibility of higher professional qualifications for adults*

In HOOP 2000, the government expresses the expectation that in future the demand for higher professional education will increase and will be more varied. It is thought that adults, much more than is now the case, will want to expand their qualification profile with a qualification at higher professional level. It is pointed out that the range of qualifying curricula will have to be adapted to the wishes and possibilities of (working) adults. Flexible programming, which takes account of working hours and caring tasks, is called for. Government does not give itself an active task in regulating demand and supply. It is up to the institutions to recognise this (latent) demand and to adapt their provision of courses to this developing demand, while employers and employees are expected to pay the costs. 'Employers and employees are primarily responsible for financing. Employers will have to be willing to educate further especially older workers (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 1999a, p.29).

To what degree are institutions active in developing such courses? Precise figures on the participation of adults in flexible qualifying curricula are not known, neither are figures available about the spread of these curricula. An indication of the growth of interest in such flexible courses could be the growth in participation in part-time higher professional education. After a decline between 1993 (10 187) and 1995 (7 764), yearly entrance from 1996 (8 733) to 1999 (13 083) rose gradually (Education Inspectorate, 2000, p. 224). Total participation rose from 45 000 in the school year 1997/98 to 48 000 in 1998/99 ([2]). However, interpreting these figures is problematic because these part-time facilities are not only used by adults, but also by young people who want to combine their studies with a job. It must be noted that this growth reverses a trend of decline. In 1981, there were 85 000 participants in part-time education. However, the conclusion that participation in higher professional education is still very concentrated in the lower age range is justified.

### 2.1.4. Determining the content of initial professional education in relation to lifelong learning

#### *2.1.4.1. Determining the content of secondary vocational education*

In the qualification framework of Dutch MBO education, the standards and qualifications of courses are determined nationally. Qualifications are defined at four levels in each sector. Every qualification consists of a set of partial qualifications, which in turn comprise a range of coherent standards. The sector-based qualification framework is intended to facilitate interaction between initial vocational education, and business and industry. At the national level, representatives of business and industry (the social partners) and of MBO education determine the content of qualifications. Important in this are the foundations on which qualifications are established. To what extent do notions of lifelong learning determine the content of qualifications? To this question two conflicting answers are possible.

In the first perspective, initial vocational education is intended to establish a foundation for lifelong learning and working. This foundation can be built upon later. Qualifications are primarily intended for MBO education in its role to provide for levels of competences which will give graduates optimum possibilities for responding to innovations in their field of work and possibly changing from one profession to another. Therefore qualifications should be sufficiently broad.

In the second perspective, qualifications represent the 'state of the art' in professions, and are defined independently of their application in MBO education. Standards and qualifications

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([2]) Preliminary figures for the school year 1999/2000 indicate an increase to 53 600 participants in part-time education (*Source*: CBS, www.cbs.nl/nl/cijfers/kerncijfers.soz.1598a.htm, update February 2000). A possible explanation for this growth could be the rising numbers of adult entrants to teacher training. A serious shortfall of teachers has led to flexible training trajectories for people who decide to become teachers later in life – the so-called horizontal entry. These courses seem to be an unexpected success (*NRC Handelsblad*, 14.10.2000).

mirror the competences of a well-defined working practice. They serve as a 'frame of reference' for the benchmarking of initial learning processes and for benchmarking learning and working experiences, which have been acquired later in life. If competence development in initial vocational education is widened, tension will arise between the breadth of a qualification and the representation of daily vocational practice.

What is the position of Dutch MBO qualifications in this tense relationship? The tension between the two perspectives is reflected in Dutch qualifications. Polder et. al. (1999, p. 20) point out that in the definition of qualifications 'the choice has been made to aim "initial" secondary vocational education at future-oriented, broad and sustainable qualifications'. In practice, stakeholders are looking for a balance between this principle and the need within business for employees with knowledge and abilities that guarantee direct employability. In general, however, there is a strong tendency towards direct employability. Factors that 'pull towards' an emphasis on concrete, applicable skills involve the transparency demands of employers, direct employability especially in medium and small-sized firms, and that the employee is able to identify with an occupation (Polder et. al., 1999). In fact, it is not the definition but those directly involved in standard setting who decide on the nature of qualification.

The national qualification framework has a uniform composition of partial qualifications and standards. By dividing qualifications into certifiable partial qualifications it becomes possible to combine partial qualifications from various qualification areas. The legislature expected that this mutual comparability and exchangeability of partial qualifications would create an efficient horizontal and vertical flow. Apart from younger participants who want to broaden their qualification profile, this perspective is also relevant for working people who now have the opportunity to adapt their qualification profile quickly and efficiently. However, this expectation has not materialised so far. National bodies for vocational education (LOBs) in different sectors, which form the platforms for establishing sector-based qualifications, appear more oriented towards stressing differences rather than finding common ground. Many LOBs have to cope with a diverse business sector. This variance is translated into partial qualification frameworks, whose content shows little or no coherence. Qualifications are thus equal in structure and form, but not comparable and transparent in content. Transparency and relevance for separate sectors is put first, not coherence of content. Studies indicate that in practice there is certainly an overlap of partial qualifications. But, due to the lack of tradition in cooperation and adaptation between LOBs, this is barely taken notice of, let alone recognised in the shape of equating partial qualifications between sectors (Brandsma et al., 2000, p.24). One might correctly conclude that there is very little uptake of modules or partial qualifications between sectors, whether or not they are combined with API..

*2.1.4.2. Determining the content of higher professional education*

Initial HBO education does not have a national qualification framework. HBO has a large degree of curricular freedom. New proposals in HOOP 2000 even argue that institutions should be free independently to make changes to courses and add new courses to their

programme (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 1999a, p.40). It is thus up to institutions to determine to what extent they want to provide a foundation for lifelong learning in the content of their courses. Higher professional education claims to educate broadly employable professionals, who contribute to innovation and professionalisation in working practices, but it is not an objective of government policy to safeguard the breadth of such courses.

A recent study by Hake et al. points out that it is recognised in higher professional education that 'the initial phase of higher education must do much more than is currently the case to enable students to acquire the attitude and skills associated with a culture of lifelong learning' (Hake et al., 1999, p.40). However, opinions vary on the question on which type of attitudes and skills should receive more attention. Should the role of higher professional education be expanded in the perspective of lifelong learning to the stimulation of a broad intellectual development of the student, or should the emphasis remain upon the preparation for a narrow set of professional competences; learning for life or learning for work? Both HBO and universities are governed by the 1992 Law on Higher Education. The maintenance of the differences and similarities of both types of higher education is a current theme in Dutch higher education policy. Following European initiatives such as the Bologna and Lisbon declarations, there are calls from the HBO sector for greater cooperation and equality between the first phases of HBO and university education.

### 2.1.5. Designing initial vocational and professional education in relation to lifelong learning

#### *2.1.5.1. Secondary vocational education (MBO) in relation to lifelong learning*

In the perspective of lifelong learning, completion of initial vocational education by young people is an important priority for government. The government sees the most important contribution of initial education to lifelong learning as designing these courses in such a way that all participants can enter the labour market with an initial qualification. Dropout should be avoided and educational courses should be as attractive as possible. This policy is reasonably successful. The share of dropouts amongst those leaving MBO is declining. The BVE monitor gives the following figures for full-time MBO:

*Table 3: MBO completion rates*

| Leaving MBO | 1994/95 | 1995/96 | 1996/97 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Without qualification | 46 300 | 48 600 | 39 700 |
| With qualification | 33 800 | 36 000 | 48 300 |
| % leaving with qualification | 42% | 42.5% | 54.5% |

*Source: Vrieze et al., p. 48, in Duets, C. and Westerhuis, A., 2000, Agenda BVE, 1999, Koers BVE, 2000*

The Law on Vocational Training and Education (WEB) implemented in 1997 places great emphasis on the development of a differentiated range of courses preparing for national

qualifications: 'the most important idea behind the WEB is that of tailor-made education, that is organising education in such a way that participants are served optimally, in respect of their possibilities, wishes and constraints (Brussee, 1999, p. B-53). This principle of accessibility only applies in practice to young people being trained for an initial basic qualification. Older adults are free to enrol for an MBO course, but the Dutch government does not see it as its task to improve access for adults to MBO qualifications through, for example, educational leave arrangements specifically for this purpose. Training policy for working adults is seen as primarily the responsibility of the social partners.

There are three points of emphasis in the concept of tailor-made courses, which are also of importance to lifelong learning:

(a) making organisation of the educational process more flexible. In so doing, institutions switch to a policy in which the principle is that the educational process is shaped in a way that connects to the wishes and possibilities of (adult) participants;

(b) reinforcing the position of participants as critical consumers of education. By enabling (young) participants to study in a way that matches their own insights into their style of learning and their possibilities, they learn to choose consciously the form and content of their curriculum;

(c) renewal of the didactic form of the educational process. In the perspective of lifelong learning this renewal has a double aim. In the first place, didactic innovations should make the learning process more attractive to participants, so that the chance of dropout is reduced. In the second place a foundation for independent learning is established, because the learning concepts are based on greater independence of the student.

Recent research shows that flexibilisation of courses is still in its infancy. The highest relative score is in the development of possibilities to change to another educational trajectory, in which 75% of institutions are involved, while the creation of flexible length of courses seems to have the lowest priority in which only 30% of institutions are involved. This finding should be seen in terms of the fact that individualisation and flexibilisation are relatively boundless concepts. In many areas individual needs can be defined and flexibility is possible with reference to: points of entry and exit, the pace of learning, examinations, changing the curriculum, level and direction, additions to the programme, honouring exemptions and taking account of gaps in previous knowledge and studying abilities (Doets et al., 2000).

A strong position for participants is also important in developing demand-led provision. Articulation of demand is an important prerequisite for the development of demand-oriented and tailor-made provision in combination with working and learning. Research by the Education Advisory Council (*Onderwijsraad*) shows that participants in secondary vocational education still have a weak position (Berg, 1998). Their abilities to participate actively in the design of their curriculum are underdeveloped. Flexibilisation of courses does not systematically take account of the wishes of participants. For example, there is a clear demand for differentiation of the pace of learning with some 40% of participants expressing this need,

while in practice only about 15% are able to benefit. The need for flexible entry exists mainly among older participants (Doets et al., 2000).

Renewal of the didactics of learning processes is the third way of making education more attractive to participants. Within secondary vocational education there are a large number of projects intended to introduce pedagogic-didactic innovations. Many courses are experimenting with combinations of self-directed learning, problem-oriented learning and open learning. Self- directed learning places the emphasis upon the stimulation of independent and group learning and the learning of skills. Problem-oriented learning places the emphasis on vocationally-oriented learning by looking at vocationally-related problems. Open learning encourages independent and flexible learning with the application of ITC's (Onstenk, 2000, p. 111) ([3]). The core of all approaches is the encouragement of independent learning, increasing the responsibility of learners in managing their own learning processes and strengthening the relationships with working practice. Although many projects are still in an experimental phase, Onstenk finds that secondary vocational education (MBO) has an advantage over other sectors of education in terms of the multiplicity of experiments (Onstenk, 2000, p. 140).

Learning in the workplace assumes an important role in MBO. Both educational trajectories in MBO presume that the student spends an important part of the course in the workplace. The vocational preparation trajectory (*beroepsopleidende leerweg - bol*), has a workplace component of between 20% and 60% of course time. The work-based training trajectory (*beroepsbegeleidende leerweg- bbl*), has a workplace component of at least 60% of course time. Workplace learning strengthens the transfer of school knowledge to working practice, offers possibilities to get to know the job in practice, to practise working skills in concrete working situations and prepares for lifelong learning in the workplace. As a consequence, the structuring and guidance of work-based learning processes is an important point. Through this structuring and guidance, students not only learns the skills specified in the learning goals, but they also experience how learning takes place in the workplace. Learning in the workplace thus acquires a double meaning in the sense that, on the one hand, the workplace is one of the learning environments in initial vocational education, and, on the other hand, it is a place for the development of practical learning strategies. A presumption is that reintegration of learning and working is possible. Although this presumption is not uncontroversial, it is the basis for many reflections on the role of workplace learning as a strategy for lifelong learning.

Such developments have great consequences for the position, role and tasks of teachers. Traditional concepts of professionalism and professional identity are put under pressure. What is demanded is a multiple change in orientations and working methods, which comes down to the guidance of learning processes of participants in education who are themselves learning to

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([3]) In the technical sector of MBO, 90% of participants work with text-processing programmes, 50% with software packages specific to vocational practice, and 50% with educational software. These programmes and packages replace the traditional classical teaching but they are not used to replace the practical part of training. See: Pauwels, *Monitoring ATB*, 's-Hertogenbosch: CINOP, 1999.

manage their own learning processes. Although teacher-training courses are adapted to meet these developments, most teachers are prepared for their new role by way of the reorganisation of education in their own schools. As is the case in companies, the retraining of teachers is regarded as an integral aspect of organisational development.

### *2.1.5.2. Higher professional education (HBO) in relation to lifelong learning*

Educational renewal in higher professional education (HBO) is to a certain extent similar to innovation in secondary vocational education (MBO). There is also a significant degree of attention for the flexibility of the courses on offer, the introduction of new pedagogical-didactic concepts and the strengthening of the position of participants. In international terms, Dutch higher professional education achieves average results. For this reason, the government only regards improvements in specific elements as necessary (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 1999a, p. 26).

Dual curricula comprise an important innovation currently in the spotlight. Within dual curricula, which combine working and learning, young people who are being 'bought up' by companies because of the tight labour market or who prefer to combine working and learning, can complete their studies. By offering possibilities to combine learning and working these young people are able to acquire their HBO qualification.

Although this flexible form of education receives a lot of public attention, participation is relatively limited. In the school year 1999/2000, there were an estimated 5000 dual students in the HBO sector of a total of 235 000 students. While these curricula would be very well suited to working people who want to attain a (new) qualification at higher professional level, it is not expected that there will be a broader application of this option due to the small number of participants (Hake et al., 1999).

In offering variety in curricula, mainly through differentiation in pace and thus in the length of study, educational institutions can cater for the increasing trend among young people to be involved in work during their education. Sooner than the education system itself, it is apparent among young people that the strict divide between the initial learning phase and later phases of life in which work plays a central role is fading. Flexibility has so far been mainly concentrated on offering the three types of curricula which have been discussed above: (a) the full time curriculum, (b) the dual curriculum, and, (c) part-time curriculum. Each of these curricula has its own organisational structure in which a student is enrolled. As a consequence, flexibility in terms of accommodating individual preferences, which sometimes vary through time, is only limited; it is not tailor-made. HOOP 2000 proposes to make switching between courses and institutions easier by the introduction of a 'moment of choice', when the student receives a partial certificate. This would make the system a little more flexible, but even then it is not tailor-made for participants.

The introduction of partial certificates is a start, however, in strengthening the position of learners in their role as consumers of education and training. For the longer term, HOOP

paints a picture of a funding structure that will greatly strengthen the position of the learner as a consumer. It is proposed to divide the funding of courses into two or three moments of payment between the moment of entry and the attaining of a qualification. By coupling the funding of institutions to performance, expressed in credits attained by the student, there will be a system in which institutions are not funded on the basis of qualifications (output funding) or length of study, but on the basis of partial certificates. Students can decide two or three times during their studies to stop temporarily, to change courses or to transfer to other institutions. Funding of the course is then either stopped, or goes to the course or institution that receives the student. The expectation is that the educational aspirations of the student become central. This will stimulate students to make conscious choices, to articulate their educational preferences and stimulate educational institutions to respond (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 1999a, p. 122).

According to the educational report on the year 1999, almost all courses are working on educational innovation. Learning to learn, project-based and problem-based education have been widely introduced, although courses vary widely in the degree to which they have progressed in implementing these concepts (Education Inspectorate, 2000, p. 187). Often this didactical renewal of education is coupled with more intensive use of ITCs, although this is usually limited to standard applications such as word-processing, Internet, e-mail, and library search systems. More than three-quarters of students use these applications either on a daily or weekly basis. Large-scale use of ICTs as active learning components in curricula, however, is absent for the time being (Education Inspectorate, 2000, p. 206).

As a result of these developments, the role of the teacher has changed from the transfer of knowledge to the facilitation of the learning processes undertaken by students. In parallel, the emphasis in the retraining of teachers is moving towards improving their educational and didactical expertise, whereas previously the emphasis was upon investing in their expertise with regard to subject content. A significant change in their role in the learning process becomes clearly visible when students are expected much more to acquire knowledge independently.

In contrast to secondary vocational education, quality development in work-based learning is making little progress in higher professional education. The learning effect of internships is still too much dependent on factors such as the quality of the internship placement, the internship supervisor and the individual student involved (Education Inspectorate, 2000, p. 189). The control and arrangement of work-based learning leaves a lot to be desired. Higher professional education appears to be ambivalent towards learning outside the school. This is evident in their stance on APL as an alternative to formal entry requirements. In alternative curricula such as dual learning or part-time curriculum, the time spent in the workplace is more often seen more as a brake on the pace of learning rather than a new chance for enhancing learning within the framework of initial education.

### 2.1.6. Conclusions

This section of the report has examined the contribution of initial secondary vocational and higher professional education to the development of lifelong learning in the Netherlands. The assumption was that the concept of lifelong learning can impact upon initial vocational and professional education in two ways: (a) by contributing to the preparation of younger people for a lifetime of learning, and, (b) by making initial qualifications more accessible to adults.

What is the contribution of initial education to preparing young participants for a lifetime of learning? The Dutch population attaches great importance to education. As a social issue, education, together with health and security/crime, is one of the top three issues Dutch people find important (Vrieze et al., 2000, p. 1). The relatively high participation in education in the Netherlands among the age range 20 to 24 indicates that there is broad consensus about the importance of a strong initial base for a lifetime of learning (OECD, 2000b). In educational circles, there is consensus about the relevance of learning to learn or independent learning and enlarging the influence of students upon their learning processes. These principles have not been implemented entirely everywhere, but there is not an institution without projects which are intended to implement these principles.

Things look rather different with regard to establishing learning contents in preparing for lifelong learning. Both secondary vocational and higher professional education are struggling with the definition of the contents that should anticipate lifelong learning. In higher professional education, this rethinking of learning content is connected to questions about the function of higher professional education. Should it focus on learning for life or will learning for professional practice remain the core of higher professional education? In secondary vocational education, it is up to education and the sector-based social partners to develop qualifications with an optimum mix of technical skills and transfer potential. So far the emphasis in qualifications appears to be on concrete technical skills, directly referring to activities in the workplace.

Recent introduction of the competence concept for qualifications aims to resolve the dilemma between direct practical relevance and providing a broad basis for lifelong learning and working. Competences are defined as a set of knowledge, attitudes and abilities that can be used to perform concrete activities in an adequate way (planning, execution, checking and control), and deal with the tasks, problems, dilemmas and contradictions that can occur at work, in such a way that certain standards are met (Onstenk, 2000, p. 45). In the choice of words in this definition, dilemma resolving has certainly succeeded. According to this definition, competences are: (a) sets of knowledge, skills and attitudes applicable in several places; (b) can be materialised in concrete activities; and (c) are testable, because they meet objective standards. The idea is that in identifying core problems and core tasks for characteristic occupations, content will become available with which learners are able to develop those competences. As a potential way out of the dilemma illustrated here, this concept has enjoyed a lot of support in the Netherlands. Currently, the concept is being

developed further and applied experimentally. Thus, little can be said about the degree to which it meets expectations.

What about the accessibility of secondary qualifications for adults? Government has adopted the position that in the interaction between demand and supply an accessible range of courses should be developed. This does not appear to be developing quickly. In secondary vocational education, the first steps are being taken towards the development of APL procedures and the participation of adults in initial curricula. The pace of developments is slow. So far the introduction of APL is dominated by bilateral projects in which a large company or group of cooperating companies upgrade a part of their employees to a higher level of qualification. Why do we not see the growth of an open market of individual customers and suppliers, in which there is also space to invest in alternative, less school-bound, qualification courses? Vrieze et. al. conclude in their literature research that market forces appear to take a hesitant attitude. Suppliers are waiting for a substantial demand before investing resources in the development of APL procedures and many customers are waiting until an accessible offer is available (Vrieze et al., 2000). In higher professional education the picture is almost identical. APL is still in its infancy and there is only a slight increase in the number of adults enrolled in initial courses.

An interesting question is whether this slow 'natural' growth rate can be accelerated. Can demand be increased by the development of a greater supply? Would supply generate its own demand and can investments by suppliers be recouped in this version of the market? Educational institutions do not appear willing to take this investment risk. It might be a task for government to give these institutions an impulse.

## 2.2. New forms of learning in labour organisations

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### 2.2.1. Introduction

In Section 2.2., attention is turned from publicly-financed initial vocational education towards the private provision of post-initial education and training and in particular company-based training. Within the context of lifelong learning there is an expectation that the difference between initial and post-initial education and training will be less distinct, and that both public and private providers will operate in both areas. As expressed in earlier parts of this report, however, the flexible and optimal utilisation of secondary vocational education and training for the (re-)qualification of adults remains significantly underdeveloped. Research by the Central Statistical Office does show that there is some growth in the buying-in by companies of education and training activities from public providers. None the less, the market share of these public providers is small in comparison with private providers and sector-related training organisations. Mulder, Witziers and Enklaar (1997) find similar data in their research. While private providers have a market share of 40% (1995) to 45% (1996),

public providers such as higher education and ROCs have around 13%. There are few indications that this will increase substantially in coming years.

At the same time, however, company-based learning is a growth market. In the Netherlands, this growth applies in terms of both numbers of participants and expenditure. In the period 1986 to 1990, the annual rate of growth in participation was 11% while the expenditure grew by 9%. This rapid rate of growth appears to have peaked in the early 1990s, and both participation and expenditure are now expanding by about 5% per year. The differences between different sized firms are significant. In the period from 1990 to 1993, there was little growth in participation or expenditure in large companies with more than 500 employees. They had apparently reached a ceiling in their training effort. In contrast, there was still substantial growth in expenditure by small firms with less than 100 employees; about 13% on average. Statistics regarding participation and expenditure primarily relate to formal courses organised either by the firms themselves in-house or are bought-in from external providers. With reference to less formal education and training activities, such as on-the-job learning, team-based learning or self-directed learning, there are few or no quantitative data available; this despite the impression that they outnumber the volume of participation in courses.

The growth and increasing importance of company-based learning in the context of lifelong learning is explained in terms of demographic developments, such as the greying of the population, globalisation of the economy and society, widespread application of information and communication technologies, the changing labour market, and revised conditions of employment such as flexibility of work, decline of life-time jobs, and changing job specifications. It is vital for firms to invest in their most important production factor - human capital - to maintain and strengthen their competitive position in the knowledge society.

These kinds of arguments for lifelong learning mainly come from policy determining organisations such as European Union and the OECD. As already indicated above there is real growth in the amount of training taking place. The causes of this continuing growth are not really clear. Of course, rapid technological innovations and changes in the content of work play a role, but the relation between these factors and the size of investments in training is less simple than is generally assumed. In a study of Australian and American firms, Curtain (2000, p. 29-37) comes to the conclusion that firms tend to respond to the development of the knowledge economy by adapting their organisational structure in the direction of flatter organisations with a greater deal of responsibility for quality and innovation on the shop-floor. It is this combination of organisational change and meeting the challenges of the knowledge economy that adds to the importance of learning and especially informal learning as a part of work. Research by Tjepkema et al. (1999) found that this is also true to some extent in the Netherlands. It is mainly larger companies operating in the global knowledge economy that turn to organisational renewal to maintain their competitive position, and in this context, they regard training or rather learning as a structural element in organisational policy.

Despite widespread recognition of the importance of lifelong learning and company-based learning, it is exactly in the area of company-based learning that persistent problems can be

identified. This involves the accessibility of company-based learning, the link between organisation policy and training policy, and the issue of the effectiveness of company-based learning.

### 2.2.2. Accessibility of company-based learning

In *Lifelong learning for all*, the OECD (1996) identified four 'risk categories' with regard to the accessibility of both education and training and company-based learning:

(a) unemployed job-seekers have less access to lifelong learning than employees in training financed by firms;

(b) low-educated workers often regarded by employers as less trainable and for whom the costs of appropriate training in knowledge and skills required are too high;

(c) older workers: a barrier to the training of older workers is the assumption by employers that investments in their training will produce limited returns given the shorter working-life remaining compared to younger employees. There is also the persistent and incorrect prejudice that the learning capacity of older workers declines;

(d) women: given their less strong connections with the labour market and the fact that women tend to work part-time, returns on investments in vocational education and training are lower than for men which discourages employers from investing in training of their female employees.

Such patterns of non-participation appear to be relatively persistent in both Europe and the United States. In the Netherlands, nevertheless, it is possible to identify gradual shifts. Data with reference to the mid-1990s indicate that participation in post-initial training by workers with a completed first phase of general secondary education had increased significantly while participation among employees with a university degree had declined slightly. The participation of older workers, both among the 35 to 44 and 45 to 54 age cohorts, had increased. With regard to their participation in company-based learning, female employees had almost completely closed the gap with males. Once again these statistics relate primarily to participation in formal courses.

### 2.2.3. Links between organisational and training policy

From time to time, critical comments are made about the effectiveness of company-based learning when the results of participation are measured in relation to the costs involved. One of the possible causes of disappointing returns is that workers are often able to make little use in practice of what they have learned. On this problem of transfer, Mulder (1998, 1999) points out that estimates suggest a 10% transfer from courses to the work-floor, but he also states that these are very rough estimates. There is little reliable research in this area. Factors playing a role in such disappointing results include among others: lack of vertical integration of policy processes at the level of organisational strategy, personnel and training practices;

limited commitment by management in the formulation of training targets and design of appropriate training programmes; pressure of work among participants; and inadequate time for workers to participate. Wognum (1999) also points out that the absence of a balance between the changing objectives of the organisation and training activities plays an important role in firms often being disappointed with returns on company-based learning. This is caused by the difference between 'training' and 'strategic training'. Strategic training only occurs when training and learning activities are matched with the needs and wishes of the organisation and the needs and wishes of the individual employees.

### 2.2.4. Effectiveness of company-based learning

Mulder refers to the lack of systematic evaluation of effects as another source of disappointing returns on company-based learning. When organisations evaluate the results of training activities, this is usually done on an incidental basis. As a consequence, there is a lack of good information on the additional marginal returns from training and there is a resort to estimates. In a sense it is not surprising that organisations invest little in the evaluation of results. The effects of company-based learning are difficult to measure for a number of different reasons:

(a) the costs are often distributed among a number of stakeholders responsible for the costs and thus difficult to determine also because it is not always clear what is included in the costs;

(b) due to the enormous diversity in the content of what is learned it is difficult to define and measure;

(c) returns are difficult to define sharply partly because they are dependent on the specific objectives employed;

(d) returns can manifest themselves at different levels;

(e) the time dimension makes it difficult to allocate clearly returns to what is learned.

These problems do not mean that evaluation of the possible effects of company-based learning is not of great importance in acquiring a view on what contributes to the general business strategy. It is also necessary to create the preconditions for workers to apply what they have learned and to share their knowledge and experience with colleagues.

### 2.2.5. Funding of learning in labour organisations

The education and training of adults, especially workers, is in the Netherlands primarily the responsibility of the social partners, employers and employees. This was obvious in the national action plan for lifelong learning and is at the core of the current employability agenda. Government policy towards lifelong learning for workers is directed primarily at fiscal measures to stimulate employers and employees to invest in the development of their own human capital. This has consequences for the information and data available in the area of company-based learning. While it is possible to sketch general trends and national

developments on publicly financed initial vocational education and training, this is much more difficult for company-based learning. Here, it is necessary to resort to specific studies among a limited group of companies, which only provides a fragmented picture.

The primacy of the social partners with regard to the lifelong training of workers is best expressed in the role of the so-called sector training funds. These funds were established during the 1980s as a result of training agreements between employers and trade unions in different economic sectors. The purpose of these funds was to stimulate the training of employees by way of subsidies for employers who trained their own workers. The funds are based upon a levy paid by all employers which amounts on average to 0.5% of the wages bill. A supplementary advantage of the training funds is that they remove the poaching of workers as one of the barriers to investment in training by employers. Employers face the risk that an employee will leave the firm following completion of a course and thus prevent any return on the investment. This problem is reduced because all employers contribute to the costs of training through the training funds. In the Netherlands, 66 training funds are operational. They distribute funds not only for company-based learning but also for initial education and training, such as the apprenticeship system. Employers who invest in training can submit an application for reimbursement of the costs involved. Normally, this will involve part of course fees but also part of the wages involved and travel costs where appropriate.

The sector training funds are thus primarily intended as a stimulus to encourage employers to invest more in the training of their employees. Although collective bargaining agreements also include provisions for the rights of workers to paid educational leave, these do not fall under the sector training funds. Stimulating individuals to invest their own personal capital is above all a question of fiscal measures. However, the Netherlands is currently participating in a European experiment with individual learning accounts. In this context, there is also consultation with the sectors about the possibilities of such individual learning accounts and setting up of pilot projects. It is not yet clear whether and in which manner individual learning accounts will be introduced. Further, a new arrangement for leave allows workers to take unpaid leave for study and caring purposes. When the employer employs an unemployed person as a replacement, the leave-taker receives financial compensation from the government. However, this compensation will rarely match the income lost.

Employers are themselves responsible for the balance. Research by Waterreus (1997) demonstrated that larger companies make relatively more use of training funds than smaller firms. It is also the case that primarily formal courses are subsidised in this way. More informal learning activities are too abstract for training funds. It is exactly these less formal learning activities which are regarded as important in the realisation of a lifetime of learning. Concepts such as work-based learning, competence management and the learning organisation are closer to the work-floor and the working environment of participants and are integrated into their daily activities.

### 2.2.6. New forms of learning in the context of work

Various references are made above to the fact that quantitative figures on the volume of company-based learning largely refer to courses or off-the-job training activities. Although the company-based learning survey of the Central Statistical Office provides some figures for the prevalence of work-based learning in different companies, there is a lack of more specific indicators on participation and costs. At the same time, there are indications of growing popularity of less formally organised forms of on-the-job training. This could be related to the assumed advantages of on-the-job training compared to off-the-job training. Advantages of on-the-job training referred to include: better possibilities for integrating theory and practice; more straightforward application of learning; contribution to quality control; decentralisation of training departments; the development of learning organisations and the integration of work and learning. There are also critical voices on work-based learning. Training in general and work-based learning in particular, demand that organisations meet certain preconditions. For work-based learning to be effective, it is necessary to resolve the built-in tensions between learning and working and the integration of learning and working processes. There is as yet only limited understanding of how the workplace should be organised as a powerful learning environment and the effectiveness of work-based learning.

To a large degree this has to do with the availability of information on this phenomenon. Although there have been different studies in recent years on work-based learning, these have largely involved case studies with a variety of approaches involving the effectiveness of a specific method to broad descriptions of organisations as qualifying organisations. It is significant that these studies usually involve large companies with an obvious training task. This does not provide a total picture of work-based learning as a new model within the context of company-based learning in the Netherlands.

According to Van der Sanden (1995), work-based learning can be defined as follows:

'Work-based learning involves that learners acquire (a part) of the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed for a specific function or occupation by way of learning activities which are located, whether or not in relation to work activities, in or near to the social, functional and physical context of the (future) workplace'.

Work-based learning can involve different activities. It can involve learning in the context of a practical placement, informal learning activities linked to practical work - with the distinction between intentional and incidental learning - and it can involve consciously organised learning situations in the workplace which are intended to stimulate learning activities among workers. The first category will not be discussed because it is primarily part of learning processes within initial vocational education and training.

#### *2.2.6.1. Work-based learning for employees*

Work-based learning does not take place automatically. Onstenk (1997) argues that work-based learning demands workers who can learn, want to learn and have a work situation that

offers learning opportunities. Whether, how and which quality learning occurs in the workplace is dependent upon the characteristics of the learners, of the organisation, the job and work environment, of the content, instruction and guidance. Van der Klink (1999) differentiates the characteristics of training which influence work-based learning:

(a) observation by expert experienced workers and learning through observation;
(b) varied practice situations;
(c) feedback on the task-performance of the learner;
(d) articulation, reflection and evaluation of methods applied;
(e) cooperation between learners;
(f) flexible organisation of learning processes.

His study of work-based learning within two large companies examined whether and to what degree the intended effects of learning took place and the degree to which the effects measured were a result of the learning. The results show not only that the two work-based learning situations had limited effectiveness, but also that effect-related characteristics of learning were hardly present. His conclusion was critical of the assumption that work-based learning is by definition effective.

From the study by Van den Tillaart et al. (1998), it appears that learning in the workplace is an effective strategy for medium and small-size firms and in particular for small firms with less than 10 employees. It is effective for resolving specific problems encountered by these firms with more formal forms of learning, such as the problem of replacing workers attending a course, coping with the lack of transparency of the training jungle, and for measuring the results of learning. On the latter, it appears that small firms facing changing market conditions consciously introduce work-based learning to meet the challenge of change. According to the workers, informal learning that is strongly related to daily working practice, such as carrying out new non-routine tasks, increasingly complex tasks, and help, advice and explanation from more experienced colleagues or experts, are effective forms of work-based learning.

Other studies on work-based learning in the Netherlands have also primarily involved large companies. On the one hand, it appears that the choice for innovation in the production process, all the different functions and working conditions create more room for the application of work-based learning than the search for a suitable form of work-based learning within the existing structure and organisation of the firm. On the other hand, it appears that firms applying work-based learning are exactly those firms dealing with fundamental changes such as technological developments and market changes. They seek to respond by introducing more or less major innovations in production processes and working methods combined with training as an important instrument. Work-based learning goes hand-in-hand with the fundamental restructuring of the organisation of work such as task groups, broader functions, integration of work and quality control. More responsibility is delegated to workers while line-managers and supervisors acquire an important training role. Such processes are not faultless. Workers have to get used to the new situation and managers are not always suitable for their training role. At a more strategic level it appears that organisational issues are not

adequately related to training and learning. Learning is all too often restricted to traditional models of training in which the adaptation of the individual to the organisation is central.

All in all, while work-based learning has acquired considerable interest among academics - often with an emphasis on theoretical and ideal-typical models, it is necessary to recognise that there is lack of a good overview of the amount and significance of this kind of learning in the market for company-based learning. Given publication next year of the results of the second European Union survey on company-based learning, more figures will be available on the number of firms claiming to practise work-based learning alongside other forms of company-based learning. None the less, both participation and volume remain unclear.

*2.2.6.2. Competence management*

Interest in competence management - or competence development - together with the revival of interest in lifelong learning, can also be placed within the context of rapid developments in the economy, society and the world of work. Mulder (1999) defines the concepts of competence and competences as follows:

'...competence is the capacity of a person or of an organisation to perform'

'...competences are elements of a competence that can be regarded as capacities for action: these comprise clusters of knowledge, skills and attitudes which enable people and organisations to perform'.

Competence management in this regard involves the management of the processes through which competence profiling, competence assessment and competence development take place. Competence profiling is the development and benchmarking of competence profiles thought to be necessary for the organisation, function groups, teams and individual workers. Competence assessment involves assessment of the degree to which organisations and people possess the competences demanded. On this basis, the process of competence development can commence involving both traditional off-the-job courses and work-based learning. According to Mulder competence management has a clear advantage compared to other related concepts such as human resource management or human resource development. This additional value rests above all in the vertical integration of organisational policy, HRM and HRD policy and the horizontal integration of different instruments in personnel policy. Further, competence profiles are more flexible and dynamic than job descriptions, while competence development promotes the employability of workers.

Mulder's study was also primarily concerned with relatively large firms, both for profit and non-profit. Research concerned the use made of competences in 80 organisations. This was true in one third of cases and for profit organisations were clearly in the majority. Organisations' involvement in competence management is a recent development. Further, there appears to be variation with regard to what is understood by the term competence, while the concept itself has yet to be effectively implemented in practice. In another 130 organisations Mulder also explored, on the one hand, the forms of learning, which have

grown in importance as a result of competence management, and on the other hand, the results of HRD projects introduced in the organisations in line with competence management. However, it remains unclear how many of these organisations worked with competence management, or in which parts of the organisations specific competence-oriented HRD projects were carried out. This makes it difficult to interpret the findings. It is clear, however, that work-based learning has gained in importance among forms of learning. Specific projects did not always deliver the desired results. Of some significance was that the intended enlargement of the engagement of managers was often not achieved.

*2.2.6.3. Learning organisations*

A third important concept is the 'learning organisation'. Tjepkema (1998) describes the learning organisation as:

'An organisation in a continuously changing environment that takes the uncertainty of change and goal-directedness as the basis of conscious policy to expand its learning potential in order to be able to anticipate change through better and improved learning, and in so doing guarantees its continuity in the face of change and at the same time maintains its direction. Learning takes place because members of the organisation at all levels continuously, collectively and spontaneously learn and place their learning experiences at the disposal of the organisation.'

Learning organisations do not arise from nothing. In the first place, employees must possess the capacity to learn and in practice the capacity to change, the motivation to learn and the opportunity to learn. To offer employees the possibility to learn and to motivate them, companies must possess a learning culture', material and immaterial support for learning, space to free workers for learning, adequate challenging functions, teamwork, goal-directedness and a motivating management style. The barriers to realising the learning organisation are to be found in demands made upon management, built-in tension between working and learning, and limitations of the learning capacity and motivation of workers.

In an international comparative study, Tjepkema et al. (1999) explored how companies become learning organisations and what the implications for HRD personnel are in the light of creating the possibilities of a lifetime of learning. The Dutch part of the study comprised four case studies of relatively large companies and a survey of another 20 large companies. The choice of large concerns was based, on the one hand, on the intention to generate comparable data between countries, and, on the other hand, by the justifiable expectation that large companies are more likely to be characterised as a learning, or at least a learning-oriented, organisation.

Both the results of the case studies and the results of the survey show that organisations seeking to become learning organisations are confronted with the changes in their environment that make it necessary to adapt production processes and ways of working. To meet these changes, reorganisations are initiated, total quality management is introduced, their

training effort is expanded and above all competence management is adopted. With regard to the HRD function within organisations, it appears that the professionals themselves are of the opinion that the more traditional HRM/HRD tasks must be decentralised to line management. The HRD function itself should assume a supportive and steering role as one of the distinctive characteristics of the learning organisation. In practice, however, it appears that despite the aspirations of HRD departments in this direction, their primary task remains that of organising and facilitating courses. For many in the organisation this is exactly what the HRD department is meant to do. Line managers are also not really motivated to take on new tasks. Transformation of the role of the training officer from training to facilitation and advising is an important barrier to the realisation of the learning organisation.

### 2.2.7. Conclusions

Relatively little information is available on the question of the ways in which private providers, in the context of company-based learning, incorporate lifelong learning in the formulation and design of their provision. The fact that company-based learning is still a growth market indicates that a lifetime of learning in the context of work is in any case taken seriously. Available statistical information concerns above all the provision of courses and not the newer forms of informal learning. This is the result of problems of monitoring and measurement. On the one hand, it is not easy to provide simple definitions of learning in the workplace that are commonly interpreted. On the other hand, it is difficult for firms to provide quantitative data with reference to informal learning given that little is recorded on such activities. In collective labour agreements, the accent is placed upon the regular forms of education and training such as the number of courses, participants and total number of working days involved.

It also needs to be pointed out that only fragmentary and scarce information is available on the distribution and effectiveness of new forms of learning such as work-based learning, competence management and learning organisations. Research is conducted in this area in larger companies on the assumption that new training models will make their appearance there in the first place. In this respect there seems to be a bias in research. This does not distract from the fact that new training models are equally important in both larger and smaller businesses in the expectation that more informal ways of learning will be of great importance in the future. Such a trend is indicated by government initiatives in the direction of investors in people, the structural application of accreditation of prior learning, open learning with the help of ICTs, and the strengthening and expansion of subsidised jobs.

# 3. Participation in lifelong learning: two empirical studies

## 3.1. The education and training market for employees in 2000

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### 3.1.1. Introduction

Even though the importance of lifelong learning is generally acknowledged, it is always remarkable to see how little information is actually available. This is not a typically Dutch phenomenon; this observation is also regularly made abroad. A recent study by Taylor (in Houtkoop, 2000b) provides an overview of statistics on participation in post-initial education and training together with the databases on which these figures are based. Clear statements on participation and especially developments in participation over time are difficult to make. There is due to different definitions and ways of questioning - sometimes even within one panel between the different survey moments - different reference periods such as participating at the moment, the past four weeks, the past year, and discontinuity in the survey moments so that longitudinal research is hardly ever done. The workforce survey (*Enquete Beroepsbevolking* - EBB) is one of the few surveys with a permanent character. For the EBB, around 80 000 people from the working population are questioned. One of the categories of questions has to do with courses followed in the past four weeks. For this reference period participation in the years 1994-97 was around 15%. Internationally, a lack of consistent and continuous data-collection within the scope of post-initial education is also recognised. There are plans for expanding and improving the existing data-collection systems - especially the Eurostat labour-force survey of which the EBB is the Dutch equivalent - or establishing new systems of data collection at European (Eurostat) or global (OECD and Unesco) levels.

Probably due to the insufficient quality of statistics on participation in post-initial education, a lot of use has been made recently of the figures of the international adult literacy survey (IALS). Even though this research was primarily focused on surveying and explaining functional literacy, a lot of information was also collected on participation in post-initial education (Houtkoop et al., 1997; Houtkoop, 2000a). The research has now been completed in 20 countries, and the Netherlands was one of the first countries to take part. Because the post-initial education monitor (*monitor post-initieel*) is strongly inspired by the IALS and because the way of questioning and operationalisation are equal on many points, there will also be reports of the IALS below, mainly to check developments in participation over time. The IALS was conducted in 1994-95, and the post-initial education monitor at the end of 1999.

To meet the lack of a continuous supply of data, the Max Goote Kenniscentrum started to monitor post-initial education at the end of 1999. A panel was formed of around 5000 Dutch people between the ages of 16 and 65, who will be questioned every two years about their

participation in any form of post-initial education or training, while the possibility to explore certain themes, also every two years, is also available. The Max Goote Kenniscentrum manages the panel and is responsible for basic information to do with post-initial education. Sponsors can - within the limits of time and quality - make use of this panel. The following statistics are from the first survey, which took place at the end of 1999. In this survey, participation in post-initial education by working people was emphasised, but attention was also given to courses followed purely out of personal interest.

### 3.1.2. The post-initial monitor panel

The size of the panel is 5230 persons between the ages of 16 and 65. For extrapolation to provide population data the results have been weighted for province, municipality size, and geographical district. The figures below are all based on weighted data.

Of the panel members, 51% are male, 49% are female. The average age is just under 40. Of the respondents, 8% were born outside the Netherlands. OECD publications regularly check the percentage of the working population with an educational level under ISCED 3 (MBO, HAVO, VWO), with the implicit assumption that this is the targeted educational level for advanced industrial countries. There is a certain analogy here with the Dutch concept of start qualification. Around 37% of the Dutch population aged 16 to 65 are under that level. The highest level of education taken part in, and completed education is presented in Table 4.

*Table 4: Highest educational level*

(%)

| | |
|---|---|
| No completed education | 1.9 |
| Primary education | 6.4 |
| Lower vocational education | 13.4 |
| General secondary | 16.0 |
| Secondary vocational | 23.6 |
| Higher secondary or VWO | 10.1 |
| Higher professional education | 19.4 |
| University | 7.0 |
| Other/not certain | 2.0 |
| Does not want to say | 0.1 |
| Total | 100.0 |

The position of the panel members on the labour market is presented in Table 5.

*Table 5: Position on the labour market*

(%)

| | |
|---|---|
| Working | 61.6 |
| Housewife/houseman | 14.2 |
| Study/at school | 8.1 |
| Retired | 5.0 |
| Occupational disability | 4.9 |
| Unemployed | 2.6 |
| Voluntary work | 2.2 |
| Other | 1.3 |
| Total | 100.0 |

About 60% are employed, while the largest 'other' category is that of housewives/housemen with 14%.

The main question was about participation in education and training. Two different approaches were used in the research. People who were employed or 'unemployed but looking for work' - a relatively small group - were asked if they were following a course related to work or career. Because the education and training of employed people was the central perspective of the first survey, the kind of education was focused upon in depth. Therefore, people who were unemployed or not looking for work were not asked this question. This could lead to an underestimation of the percentage of the population following these kinds of courses. All respondents were also asked if they were following courses purely out of personal interest. These types of courses received less in the first round of questioning. Of the group 16 to 65 year-olds, 30% were following one or more courses related to career or work, but it has to be said this is probably an underestimate, because it is likely that unemployed people not looking for a job are still following vocational-oriented courses, even if a long-term investment. Twenty percent were following a course purely out of personal interest.

In this section we will limit ourselves to the group of employed people and the courses they were following for work or career purposes. Doets will focus on participation for personal interest in Section 3.2.

### 3.1.3. Participation in education and training by working adults

The group of employed people was 59% male and 41% female. The age limits were between 16 and 65 years, and the average age was 37 years. Of the group of working people, 93% were born in the Netherlands. Table 6 presents the highest type of education completed by the employed.

*Table 6: Highest completed education of respondents in employment*

(%)

| | |
|---|---|
| No completed education | 1.4 |
| Primary school | 3.6 |
| Lower vocational school | 10.9 |
| General secondary school | 13.4 |
| Secondary vocational school | 27.4 |
| Upper secondary | 8.4 |
| Higher professional school | 23.6 |
| University | 10 .4 |
| Other/not sure | 1.9 |
| Does not wish to say | 0.1 |
| Total | 100.0 |

It is clear that employed people have a higher educational level than the total population. Striking is the dominance of professional education. Of this group, 11% completed lower vocational education, 28% completed secondary vocational education, and 24% completed higher professional education. Also, within the group with another (highest) education a significant number had had contact with secondary vocational education: this was 9% of the total group. So of the total group, 62% had completed professional education as the highest form of completed education, and 36% had participated in secondary vocational education in some way. Within secondary vocational education, the directions most followed were in order of importance: services and healthcare (32%), technique (31%) and economy (25%). Another 19% of this group had started another course of study, but had not as yet completed it.

Participation in courses and education is partly determined by the position of people on the labour market. We will give a short characterisation of these positions. The majority (75%) work on a regular basis with a contract of employment for an undefined period; while 11% are self-employed. The highly praised Dutch flexible labour market has not yet penetrated deeply; around 13% are employed on the basis of a temporary contract of employment or through an employment agency. Looking at company size, we cannot say there is a dominant pattern. Around 20% work in small companies with less than 10 employees, 31% work in middle-size companies with between 10 and 100 employees, and 43% work in larger companies with over 100 employees. In relative terms, a lot of part-time work is done in the Netherlands, which can also be seen in the figures. None the less, the majority are employed on a full-time basis, operationalised here as 36 hours or more, which comes down to 65%. The amount of working time in other categories of employed people is divided as follows: 6% 1-10 hours, 13% 11-20 hours and 16% 21-36 hours.

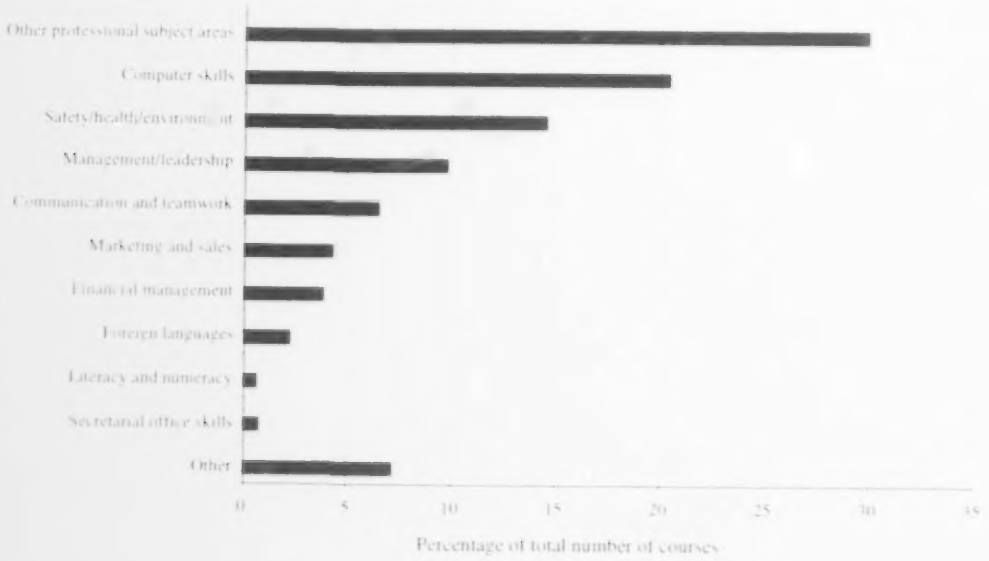
### 3.1.4. Courses related to work or career

The number of employed people following a course beneficial to work or career is large with 46% following one or more courses. The expression 'one or more' is not without meaning: of the people following a course, 61% followed one, but 39% followed two or more.

It is always difficult to make statements about decline and growth when we speak about post-initial education. To be able to do this, longitudinal measurement is necessary, and if possible in the form of a panel. This was one of the motives for starting this monitor. The survey reported on here was strongly inspired by the IALS and the types of questions and operationalisation have been largely copied from the IALS background questionnaire. This gives the opportunity to make a comparison in time, since IALS results are from the end of 1994 and early 1995, while the results from the monitor are from the end of 1999. To make this comparison possible, IALS results have been analysed for the group of employed people between the ages of 16 and 65. For this group, participation in work-related courses was examined. The participation rate in work-related courses was 34% in 1994-95, while at the end of 1999 it was 46%. Even though some technical reservations can be made on this comparison, it is clear that participation in work-related courses has gone up.

We will now return to the results of the post-initial monitor. Below, we will first take a look at the different characteristics of the courses followed. Because people regularly followed more than one course, the percentages are based on the numbers of enrolments in courses rather than the number of participants. Figure 1 offers an overview of the contents of the courses followed.

*Figure 1: Distribution of courses by subject/theme (16-65 age group, employed)*




*Source:* Hootkoop, 2000b

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Work-related courses in a large number of areas predominate, followed by courses about computer techniques, data-processing and word-processing. The sometimes-heard comment that the 'hype' surrounding computer courses is now over does not seem to be justified. Work keeps demanding new requirements in this field and courses are often seen as a solution. The relatively high amount of courses in the field of safety, health and environment is striking and is largely a result of legislation in these areas.

In most cases (62%), courses are completed with a certificate or diploma. This is also where the business-oriented character shows itself. In so far as courses are completed with a diploma or certificate they are mainly vocational or professional type diplomas (63%), followed by diplomas from higher education (10%), and - on a modest scale diplomas from secondary vocational education or apprenticeships (3%). The reasons people give reflect the work-related character of courses and are presented in Table 7.

*Table 7: Reasons for participating in courses*

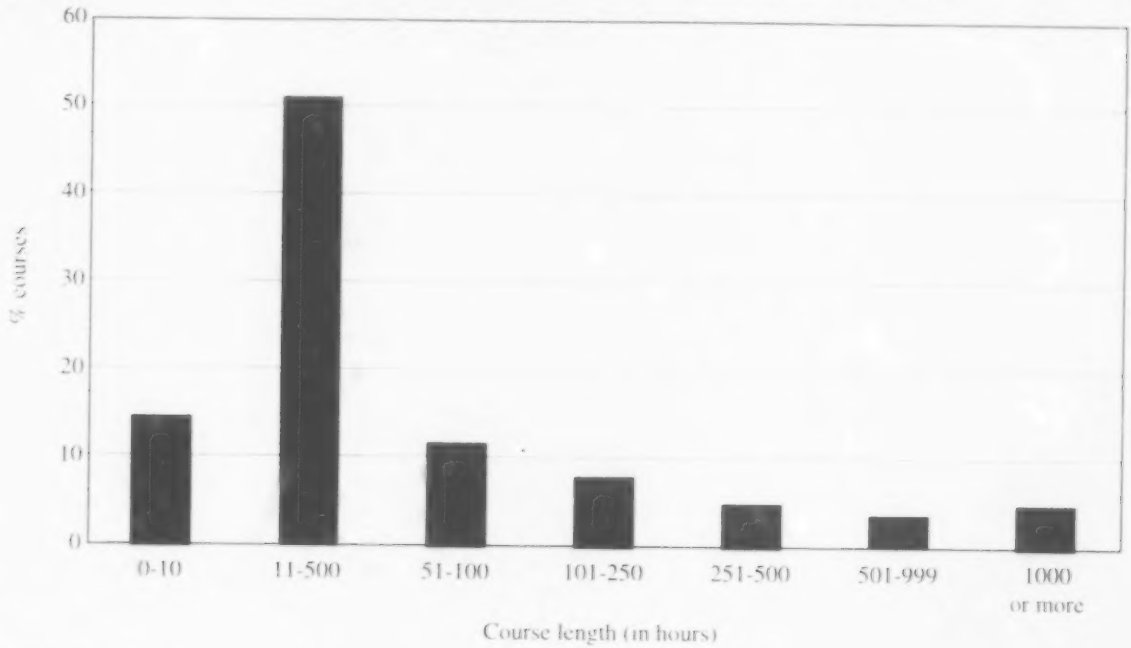
| | (%) |
|---|---|
| New and changed demands in working methods in the present job | 29 |
| New apparatus/machines/computers/software in the present job | 12 |
| Improving job opportunities | 10 |
| Improving promotion opportunities | 8 |
| New or different function | 7 |

There is another large category 'other' (32%), which needs closer inspection. Most course activities are aimed at 'keeping up-to-date' with the latest developments (around 41%). Activities aimed at a higher level of flexibility, either within the company or outside it, thus activities aimed at strengthening ones' own employability take a smaller share, around 25% in total. Around two thirds of these are aimed at ones' own company; people want to enlarge their chances of promotion or gain a new function; in one third of the cases they focus outwards, on improving their own chances on the labour market.

The significance of the course can be measured by the diplomas and the 'civil effect' that can be gained from them. But the time allocation can also give an indication. If extremely high scores of more than 1000 hours are left out of consideration, the group that participated in courses spent on average 120 hours. Averages do not say much, because the range of distribution is very large. The spread is very large mainly because respondents are following courses that are very time-consuming. Despite the high average, the median is 40 hours, as is the mode.

Figure 2 will probably give a clearer view. It concerns all the courses followed, but the categories of the course lengths have been condensed.

*Figure 2: Distribution of courses over course duration (16-65 years, working)*

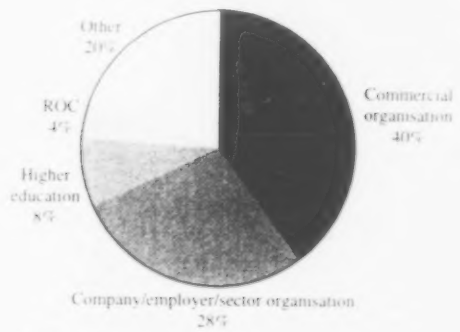



*Source:* Hootkoop, 2000b

This shows that more than two thirds of courses take 50 hours or less, which is still a substantial investment of time. Many courses are followed in the form of a short, intense period of successive days. Some 46% of the courses are within this category. Often cited are parts of the day or evenings per week over a longer period of time, or more days per week over a longer period of time are frequently mentioned relatively, respectively in 21% and 13% of all cases.

An important market question is always which institutions provide the courses.

*Figure 3: Providers of courses (16-65 years, employed)*




*Source:* Hootkoop, 2000b

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Dominance of the private over the public sector is clear. The private sector is led by commercial course-providers, which are anyhow the biggest market-players, followed by educational activities offered by companies and business sectors. They take more than two thirds (68%) of the provision for their account. The public sector, led by higher education and followed by regional educational centres (ROCs) has to settle for a 12% share, while around 20% is not part of this category. The categories not often mentioned have been placed under the category 'other', again a category that calls for further analysis.

### 3.1.5. The relationship between work and education

This is about people with paid jobs and about courses related to work or career. This is why a large number of questions were asked about the relationship between education, employment, and the employer. It turns out that in half the cases the employer took the initiative for following a course. Striking is the large amount of direct educational costs employers take for their own account. In 84% of all cases employers cover all costs (heavily subsidised nowadays), in 12% employees cover all costs, and hardly ever do employers and employees split the costs (2%). In some cases (10%), people have to pay back a part of the course costs when leaving the company. The percentage people have to pay back is of course dependent on the time passed since following the course.

Probably more important in terms of investment is the question whether employers also provide company time. Here we see a different picture with still a generous role of employers. In 67% of cases this is the case, whether entirely in working hours (44%), or partly in working hours (23%). When a course can be attended only partly in working time it usually involves half or more than half of the time involved. One can ask whether the minority of people following a course in their own time was compensated in some way. This was hardly ever the case. Of people studying at home, 10% received compensation in the form of free hours, 8% got part of their study-time compensated in the form of overtime. Nevertheless, the general impression is that employers contribute significantly to the training of their employees.

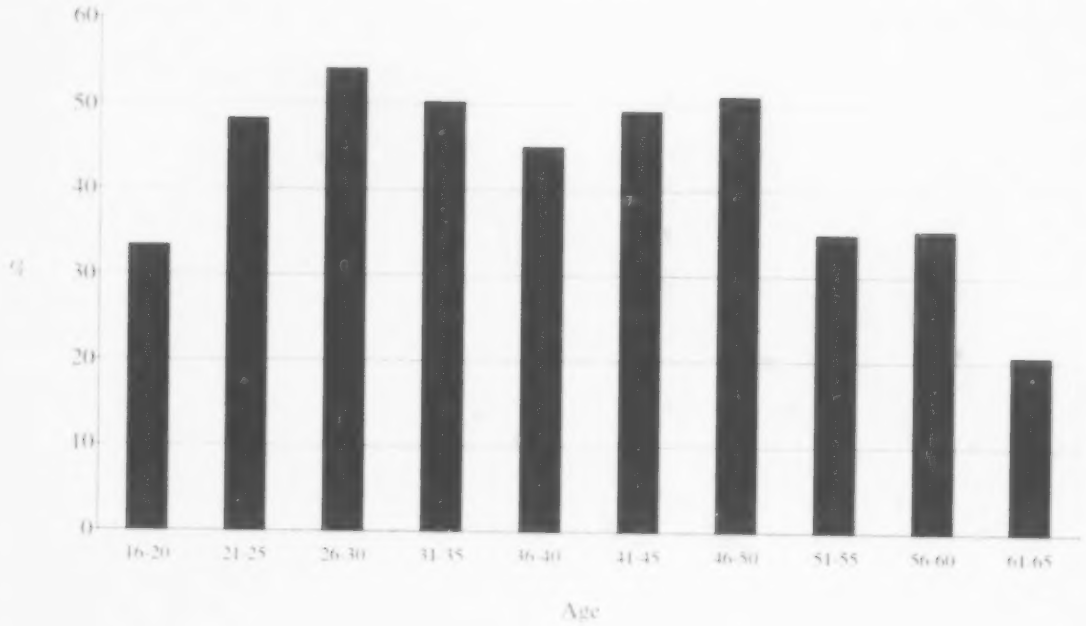
### 3.1.6. Participants' characteristics

When we look at participation in work-orientated courses, we do not see a difference between men and women, at least when we limit ourselves to the main question, if people did or did not follow a course. The relation between age and participation gives a less familiar image than we are generally used to as shown in Figure 4.

Even though there is a significant relationship, in the sense that the older age-categories participate less, the turning-point is relatively late around 50 years, and older groups still participate regularly. Until 60 years of age, there is still talk of a participation degree of around 35%. The fact that we are talking about older working people probably explains the persistence of this active attitude. It is also clear that the peak of training investment is not

reached at the start of a career but begins after the age of 25 and continues more or less to about 50.

*Figure 4: Participation in work-related courses by age (16-65 years, employed)*




Source: Hovdkvap 2000b

The relationship between previous education and participation in courses is as usual strong and significant as seen in Figure 5.

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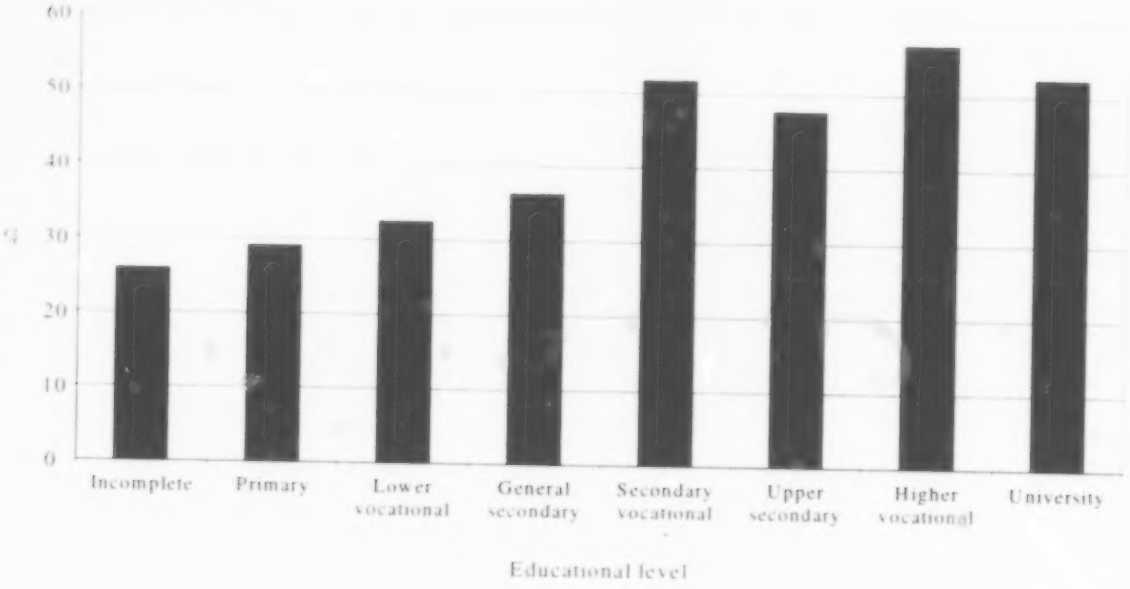
*Figure 5: Participation in work-related courses by educational level (16-65 years, employed)*




*Source*: Hootkoop, 2000b

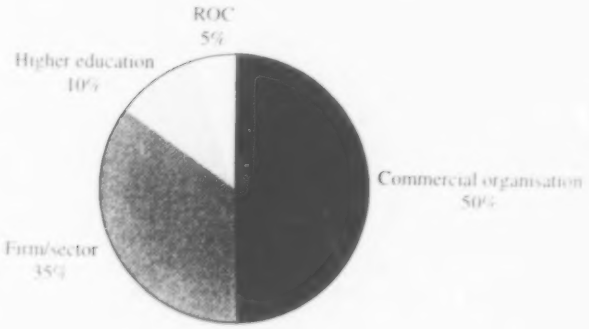
The higher the previous education, the more participation there is, although it becomes lower at higher participation levels. Striking is that at the level of secondary as well as tertiary education, participation in respectively secondary vocational and higher professional education is relatively high, compared to those with a background in general secondary and university education. For secondary vocational education we have also tried to differentiate the relationship between previous education and participation in courses according to vocational sectors. Between the three most followed fields we can, however, not see a significant relationship with willingness to follow a course.

The situation at work is a partial factor in deciding whether to follow a course, especially when the course is work- or career-orientated, and marginal demands - such as time and money - are determined by the situation at work. It is clear that employment on a temporary contract with a view to permanent employment is associated with the highest educational intensity (58%). This may be related to various forms of induction training. The training intensity of employees with a permanent contract is around 51%. With about 30% the different forms of temporary employment contracts take third place, about the same as self-employed people. The relationship between education and company size has been indicated many times before and seems a constant in this field. In this group it is also the case that a lot more education and training takes place within larger companies.

### 3.1.7. Target groups of public and private providers

We stated earlier that the 'education and training market' was mainly divided between 68% private providers, 12% public providers and 20% as yet uncategorised providers. To what extent do the private and public sectors - and within those the individual institutions or work-fields - attract different publics? Below we will limit ourselves to the 'well known' categories, public and private. A closer analysis of the 'other' category will probably lead to different results. If we limit ourselves to the two categories mentioned earlier, then we see that this group divides itself: in terms of 85% in the private sector and 15% in the public sector.

*Figure 6: Distribution of courses by providers (16-65 age group, employed)*



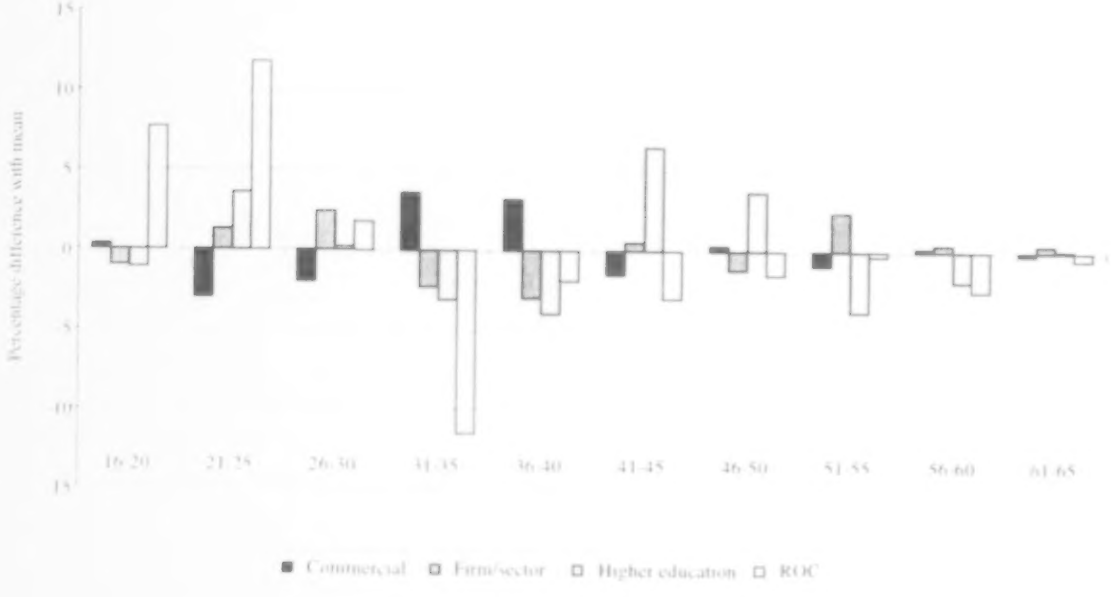

*Source:* Hoofkoop, 2000b

There are hardly any differences between men and women, though there might be a small tendency for women to make more use of public facilities. The relationship with age provides an impression of very little consistency with one exception. Younger people aged 23 to 25 make more than average use of public facilities. When we look at participants' previous educational background, it is surprising that the more highly educated people - with a background in higher professional or university education - make the highest relative use of public facilities.

We can also take a look at the clientele of different providers. To be able to do this, the rather large group 'other' was not taken into consideration, and analysis is restricted to the categories 'commercial organisation' - including the small category 'producer/dealer in hardware' - 'company and business branch', 'higher learning' and ROCs. Figure 6 shows the division of providers over the courses followed in terms of the earlier discussed adjustments. The private providers' supremacy is of course clearly visible. Among private providers, commercial providers dominate; while within the public providers the market share of higher education is twice as high as that of ROCs. We mention this again to provide a context for the following information.

How can we now characterise the clientele of these four categories of providers? Gender differences are negligible. Age gives a more varied picture. Figure 7 shows the age groups recruited more than average by the different providers; in other words, for which age groups are providers most (or least) attractive. Note that this says nothing about the absolute power to attract participants (the division of the providers mentioned earlier). ROCs do not attract many working adults where work-related education is concerned. When they do attract adults, it is especially amongst the younger age group of 16 to 25 years. Striking is the relatively low attraction of ROCs for the group of 31 to 35 years, people who in general have been working for some time - often in their first job.

*Figure 7: Providers and age of participants as percentage difference towards mean (16-65 age group, employed)*



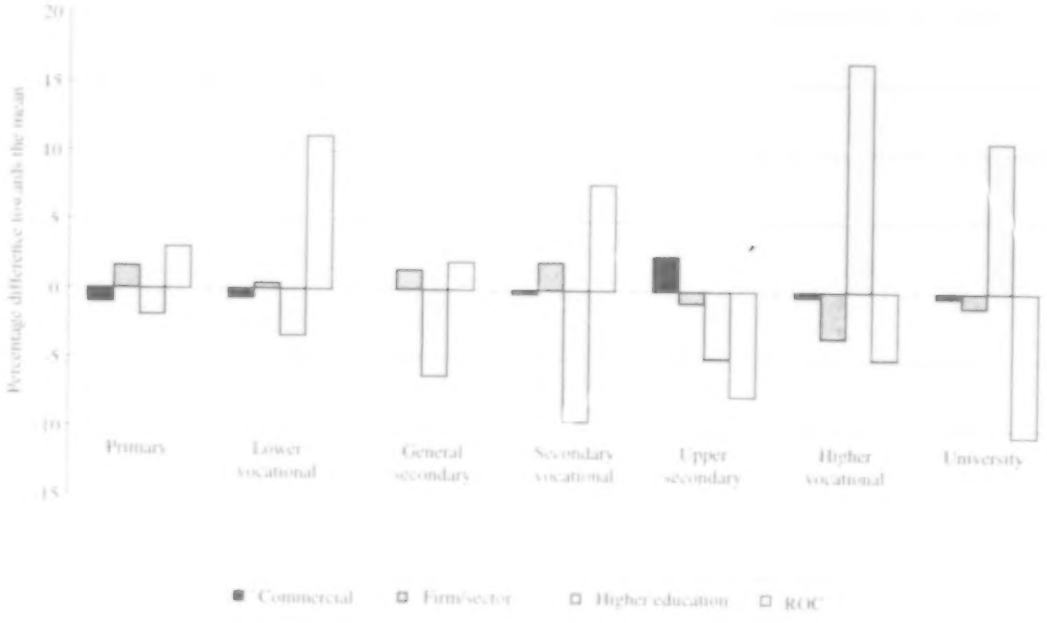

*Source:* Hoofkoop, 2000b

Higher education not only recruits above average amongst younger people, but also in the group of 41 to 50 years. In courses provided by companies, two groups attract attention because they make above average use of this kind of education: younger people aged 23 to 30 years and older people aged 51 to 55. Finally, providers with the highest market share, commercial organisations, recruit above average in the middle group aged 31 o 40 years.

Public providers are more 'exclusive' when one looks at the groups with different previous educational backgrounds from which they recruit more than average. ROCs mainly recruit from people with a lower or secondary vocational background, in higher education mainly from people with a higher professional or university education. Entry requirements in terms of previous education play an important role, but the fact that public facilities, where adults are

concerned, do not attract a larger audience raises important questions. Commercial organisations are much less 'picky' and recruit on average from all previous educational levels. In companies the same can be seen, but people with lower educational levels up to secondary vocational education seem to be over-represented. This could in itself be a favourable signal, given the regularly made observation in earlier research that participation in company courses in terms of social background is often unfairly divided. Figure 8 relates to the relation between providers and previous education of participants.

*Figure 8: Providers and educational level of participants as % difference towards the mean (16-65 age group, employed*




Source: Houtkoop 2000b

### 3.1.8. Courses for personal development and the employed

Elsewhere, in Section 3.2., Doets discusses participation by adults in courses for the purpose of personal development. We only state here that such courses were also followed by working people. Participation in these courses is clearly lower than those followed for vocational or career reasons. Of the employed respondents, 16% stated that they had followed such a course. From the content specification of these courses, it also turns out that the character of these courses, for leisure and personal development, is most important. Courses that might eventually also have a professionally-orientated character, such as courses for university or higher professional education, or computer skills are in a minority.

### 3.1.9. Conclusions

This has provided an impression of work and career-orientated courses, which were followed by working Dutch people on the eve of 2000. The data have been drawn from the first survey conducted as part of the monitor post-initial education by the Max Goote Kenniscentrum. This monitor will facilitate the benchmarking of participation in post-initial education in future years. Participation in courses within this group is impressive; 46% participated in one or more courses in the year before the research. Compared to 1994-95, there is a clear increase from 34% to 46%, which is a clear indication of a strengthening of lifelong learning.

Participation mainly involved work-related courses with a relatively high number of courses in the field of computer techniques and data-processing. Most courses are aimed at the present function; improvement of personal employability is a less important motive. This is above all a 'defensive' perspective on lifelong learning in which learning is above all directed at maintaining one's own position in the light of new demands. The average course-length is around 40 or 50 hours a year.

Among the providers, the private sector dominates and is led by commercial providers and courses offered by companies and branch organisations. They take two thirds of the market for their own account. The public sector has to settle for 12%, with the biggest share in higher education. An important policy question in the coming years is whether the publicly funded institutions should try to increase their market share either for financial reasons or in order to be innovative. Perhaps the term policy question is an incorrect formulation. As a result of the decentralisation process and their increased autonomy, it is the institutions themselves that will be confronted with this question at regional level and have already started to formulate their different answers.

Work is the biggest motivator for following a course. Employers often take the initiative and they usually also pay the direct educational costs. Of greater interest in terms of investments in training, is the fact that employers are relatively generous in making working time available or in compensating employees for their lost leisure time. In relation to the average time spent by employees on training, employers make large investments available for lifelong learning. In 1993, this involved NLG 3.5 billion (EUR 1.59 billion) for both the direct and indirect costs of training (Waterreus, 1997), and, given the increased levels of participation since then, a total of NLG 5 billion (EUR 2.27 billion) would be now involved.

Looking at the characteristics of the participants there does not seem to be too many differences between men and women. The gap seems to have closed, although this only involves participation as such. There are still differences between men and women in terms of the types of courses followed. The well known age effect - older people participate less than younger people-does occur, but the turning-point seems to be later than in previous research. Only after the age of 50 can a clear decrease in participation be seen.

The relationship between previous education and participation is, as usual, strong and significant. Most striking is the strong professional-orientation of people with a background in professional education.

Are certain types of institutions particularly attractive to certain groups? ROCs recruit an above average amount of younger people and people with a background in lower or secondary vocational education. Higher education is more attractive to younger people and the group aged 41 to 50 years. They mainly recruit among people with a higher professional or university education background. Public facilities seem to have a somewhat exclusive recruiting area. Commercial organisations recruit from all age groups, but are strong in the middle group of 31 to 40 year-olds. In terms of participants' previous education, they are also not fastidious, for they recruit from all levels. The same is applicable to companies, although they recruit more from lower educational levels, in itself a good signal. As far as age groups are concerned, companies are stronger among the younger (23 to 30 years) and older people (51 to 55 years). In general, commercial training companies and businesses themselves would appear to have a more 'democratic' pattern of recruitment.

It must be clear that the foregoing relates to lifelong learning for work and for employees. This is a central element of lifelong learning, but it is certainly not the only element. The other elements and aspects of lifelong learning are explored in other contributions to this report.

## 3.2. Participation in learning for personal development ([4])

**Dr Cees Doets, CINOP**

### 3.2.1. Introduction

In the context of organising the national week of learning in September 2000, CINOP conducted research focusing on learning for personal development. Personal development is a rather broad concept. It refers primarily to the personal learning motivation of an individual. Motivation which may be intrinsic, as for example 'learning just for fun', or extrinsic, as for example 'learning for a hobby' or 'learning to keep up in society'. In this research, personal development was used as an 'umbrella concept' that referred to all learning which was not primarily work- or career-related. Partners in the research were the Max Goote Expertise Centre, Teleac/Dutch educational television, and the National Institute for Public Opinion. During the month of June 2000, 1100 respondents from the Max Goote panel, complemented with respondents older than 65 ([5]), were interviewed by telephone. After corrections to the sample population 1000 respondents were included in the analysis. The primary purpose of

([4]) Section 3.2. contains a summary of Doets et al. 2000.

([5]) For other background data, refer to the contribution by W. Houtkoop, Section 3.1.

the research was to acquire insight into the level of participation by the Dutch population in non-work related courses and the value allocated to developing their knowledge. The findings are important in determining the degree to which there is an adequate foundation for the development of a system of lifelong learning. The major results are presented in this section and refer to the total sample. Where relevant, significant differences between subpopulations, such as sex, age and education, will be mentioned.

### 3.2.2. Participation and intentions

Respondents were asked whether they had participated in the past year in one or more courses devoted to their personal development.

*Table 8: Participation in courses (in percentages)*

| Course followed | Total population | Men | Women |
|---|---|---|---|
| No | 80 | 84 | 76 |
| 1 | 14 | 12 | 16 |
| 2 | 4 | 3 | 6 |
| More | 1 | 1 | 2 |

In comparison with studies in earlier years, the level of participation in courses has increased ([6]). Of the respondents, 20% indicated that they had participated in a non-work-related course. The overwhelming majority had participated in just one course. In line with previous research, women respondents in this study reported a higher level of participation than men in courses for personal development.

Respondents were also asked about their intentions for participation in the future, which also involved a comparison of work-related courses and those for personal development. The results are presented in Table 9. For the purposes of clarity the age category 20 to 29 is compared to the 60+ age category ([7]).

*Table 9: Intentions for the coming year (in percentages)*

| Plans | Total | Men | Women | 20-29 | >60 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| No | 21 | 21 | 20 | 14 | 36 |
| Perhaps later | 44 | 44 | 44 | 45 | 43 |
| For work | 12 | 15 | 8 | 21 | - |
| For personal development | 18 | 14 | 23 | 9 | 20 |
| Both | 6 | 6 | 5 | 11 | - |

([6]) However, it is difficult to make good comparisons because there is no unity in definitions and methods of research. Houtkoop and van der Kamp for instance report that the participation in 1984 in all forms of adult education (work-related and not-work-related) was about 19%. See: Houtkoop et al. (Eds), 1988.

([7]) For a comparison between all age categories see Doets et al., 2000.

For the total population, future intentions do not significantly differ from participation in the recent past. While 20% had followed a course for personal development in the past year, 24% have this intention in the coming year whether or not in combination with work. About 12% are considering participation in a work-related course. This means that 37% of the population have concrete plans for future participation. Adding this group to those with vague intentions, it appears that 80% of the population have an interest in learning. There are differences between men and women. Women are more interested in courses for personal development, while men have greater interest in work-related courses. This difference is related to their respective levels of participation in work. With regard to age, younger adults clearly have more plans than the older category. Younger adults are clearly more interested in work-related courses or in a combination of work-related courses and personal development courses than in courses strictly for personal development.

### 3.2.3. Themes and time allocation

With regard to both past participation and future intentions, respondents were asked about the dominant themes in courses attended or planned. These are presented in Table 10. With reference to the four most frequently mentioned themes, the significant differences are indicated with reference to the factors sex and age (*).

*Table 10: Most frequently mentioned themes (in percentages)*

| Category | Followed | Plans | Men | Women | 20-29 | >60 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Hobby | 40 | 20 | 24 | 76 | 43 | 30 |
| ICT | 16 | 27 | 66 | 34 | 10 | 33 |
| Language | 15 | 16 | 43 | 57 | 10 | 21 |
| Art/scientific/culture | 8 | 8 | | | | |
| Personal/spiritual development | 5 | 3 | | | | |
| Voluntary work | 5 | 2 | | | | |
| Safety/health/environment | | | | | | |
| Practical knowledge (*) | 3 | 3 | | | | |
| Other | 19 | 17 | | | | |

(*) Practical knowledge refers to learning the skills to do small jobs in the house and the garden, to repair certain things, etc.

Adults demonstrate an interest in a great diversity of themes, while three are of particular interest: hobbies, information and communication technology (ICT) and languages. Hobbies seem to attract most attention among the general population with 40% of all courses falling into this category. Of interest is that this category scores lower in regard to future intentions, where the category hobby scores lower than ICT courses. The latter are of particular interest to men and older adults. With regard to ICT, it would appear that younger adults have

(*) Because the differences between the subpopulations with regard to past and future participation are relatively constant, participation is reported for past participation. Further, data for the subpopulations is only reported for the three themes most referred to.

acquired significant experience with computers either in their leisure time or at school. Women have relatively more interest in language learning and for hobby-related courses. It is not surprising that older learners have an interest in language learning; a lot of the older adults did not learn a foreign language during their initial education. More surprising is the finding that the hobby category scores higher among the young than among older learners.

*Table 11: Time allocation (in percentages)*

| Duration (past year) | Percentage of learners |
|---|---|
| <20 hours | 33 |
| 21-50 hours | 26 |
| 51-100 hours | 19 |
| >100 hours | 22 |

There are significant differences in the amount of time allocated to learning. About one third of the population have allocated less than 20 hours to participation in a course during the past year. At the other extreme about 20% of respondents invested more than 100 hours in a course, while a quarter of this group allocated more than 300 hours to a course.

### 3.2.4. Ways of learning

Respondents were asked what they regarded to be the most appropriate ways of following a course. They were given four alternatives: (a) a course in a group with a teacher; (b) a television course with study materials; (c) a correspondence course, and (d) self-directed study using a computer. Answers were given on a five-point scale from 'very suitable for me' to 'absolutely not suitable for me'. The four tables below present the findings while the five-point scale is reduced to three.

*Table 12: Ways of learning perceived as appropriate, by gender and age*

(%)

| **Course in a group with teacher** | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Appropriate | Total population | Men | Women | 20-29 | >60 |
| yes | 73 | 72 | 75 | 83 | 54 |
| doubtful | 13 | 14 | 11 | 12 | 18 |
| no | 14 | 14 | 14 | 5 | 29 |
| **Television course** | | | | | |
| Appropriate | Total population | Men | Women | 20-29 | >60 |
| yes | 22 | 21 | 24 | 16 | 24 |
| doubtful | 25 | 27 | 24 | 23 | 29 |
| no | 52 | 52 | 52 | 61 | 47 |
| **Correspondence course** | | | | | |
| Appropriate | Total population | Men | Women | 20-29 | >60 |
| yes | 27 | 31 | 23 | 34 | 21 |
| doubtful | 20 | 21 | 19 | 23 | 22 |
| no | 53 | 48 | 58 | 44 | 58 |
| **Self-directed study with a computer** | | | | | |
| Appropriate | Total population | Men | Women | 20-29 | >60 |
| yes | 37 | 48 | 27 | 51 | 22 |
| doubtful | 20 | 19 | 21 | 21 | 24 |
| no | 42 | 51 | 33 | 28 | 54 |

Respondents found that the most appropriate form is still the course in a group with a teacher. In second place comes self-directed study with a computer. In this regard, there were significant differences between subpopulations. Many women and older learners did not regard this form as appropriate for them. A similar trend was apparent with regard to correspondence education. When we introduce the level of education into the analysis, it appears that the lower educated deviated from the mean with regard to self-directed study with a computer. A relatively large number among this subpopulation found this not to be an appropriate form for them. With reference to television, a minority of a quarter of the total population saw this as an appropriate method. There are some differences between the age categories as, for example, when older adults consider a television course as a more appropriate form of learning than younger adults.

### 3.2.5. Barriers to learning

Respondents were presented with four reasons that could be possible barriers to participate in a course. These were: time; costs; not used to learning; and little information about the available provision. The findings are presented in Table 13.

*Table 13: Barriers to learning (in percentages)*

| Barriers | Total population | Men | Women | 20-29 | >60 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Time | 43 | 43 | 43 | 56 | 18 |
| Costs | 34 | 33 | 35 | 40 | 33 |
| Not used to learning | 40 | 37 | 42 | 24 | 57 |
| Lack of information | 13 | 13 | 12 | 9 | 14 |

Three of the four possible barriers were mentioned by about 30% to 40% of respondents. Lack of information about available courses did not play a significant role. The most significant differences were between the age groups. Young adults regard lack of time and to a lesser degree the costs as barriers. A majority of older adults indicated that lack of study skills was an important barrier.

### 3.2.6. Why people wish to learn

Different motives can provide the basis for participation in courses. In the research, a distinction was made between 'instrumental' or 'extrinsic' motives where the person needs the skills and knowledge for other activities, and 'secondary' or 'intrinsic' motives where skills and knowledge are not primarily linked to other activities. Five motives were distinguished. Three instrumental motives were 'learning for work and career', 'learning to keep up in society', and 'learning for personal development in general'. Two secondary motives were 'learning is enjoyable' and 'learning is a way to meet other people'. These five possibilities were put to the respondents with a five-point scale for indicating the importance of the different motives (*).

*Table 14: Motives to learn (in percentages)*

| Important motive | Total population | Men | Women | 20-29 | >60 | Lowest education level (*) | Highest education level |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Personal development in general | 64 | 64 | 64 | 80 | 35 | 67 | 74 |
| Learning is enjoyable | 36 | 29 | 43 | 42 | 27 | 35 | 53 |
| Keep up in society | 50 | 50 | 50 | 52 | 33 | 54 | 55 |
| Work and career | 57 | 61 | 53 | 83 | 14 | 57 | 70 |
| Meeting others | 24 | 19 | 29 | 18 | 22 | 34 | 19 |

(*) Lowest level is <= vbo/mavo, highest level = >hbo/university

A majority of respondents found four of the possible motives to be important. Instrumental motives are more important than non-instrumental motives. Apparently adults consider learning a prerequisite to reach certain goals in life. Highest scores were for personal

(*) For purposes of clarity the table gives the percentages of respondents who regard motives as 'very important' or 'important'. The analysis shows that 25% of respondents scored in the middle category of important/not-important. The exception here was the motive 'learning for work' where 10% were uncertain.

development together with work and career. The social motive was relatively less significant. There are some differences between the different groups. The social motive for learning is for women relatively more important than for man. It is also significant that women scored higher with regard to the motive 'learning is enjoyable'. There were major differences between the age groups. Young adults scored higher than the older ones for almost all motives, with the exception of the social motive. This suggests that the motivation to learn declines 'on all fronts' during the life-course. With reference to the level of education, there were significant differences. The higher educated score higher on four of the five motives. Only for the motive 'meeting others' they scored lower than the lower educated.

Research conducted in 1983 among a representative sample made partial use of the same categories of motives(see: Doets, 1986). Compared to 20 years ago, one can conclude that learning in relation to work and career is now more important together with learning for personal development in general. Learning in order to meet other people scored higher in earlier research.

### 3.2.7. Learning in modern society

Finally, respondents were asked a number of questions on the degree to which they thought that lifelong learning was essential in modern society. The answers to these questions give an indication of the degree to which there is a foundation for the development of lifelong learning in the Netherlands. Respondents were presented with the following propositions:

(a) adults also have to keep learning;
(b) what you need to know you learn-by-doing in daily life and at work;
(c) every Dutch person must return to school from time to time;
(d) the importance attached to education and training is extremely exaggerated;
(e) society changes so quickly that you have to follow courses in order not to fall behind.

*Table 15: The importance of learning in society (in percentages)*

| Proposition | Agree | Uncertain | Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|
| A: keep learning | 71 | 19 | 10 |
| B: you learn by doing | 41 | 36 | 23 |
| C: return to school | 37 | 31 | 32 |
| D: learning is exaggerated | 14 | 19 | 67 |
| E: learn to keep up with changes | 64 | 24 | 12 |

The answers by respondents indicate that the vast majority recognise the importance of learning in modern society. Some 60% to 70% were of the view that adults also need to continue learning in order to keep up. A similar percentage is of the opinion that the emphasis on learning is not exaggerated. Opinions on the other propositions were a little more divided due to the many who were uncertain. While about one third of respondents were of the view that every Dutch adult needs to return to school from time to time, 40% were of the opinion

that learning in daily life is adequate. The different subpopulations were not included in the table because there are relatively insignificant differences between them. It is necessary to note however, that:

- the higher educated were more likely to think that the importance of learning is exaggerated;
- the lower educated were more often of the opinion that rapid changes in society demand involvement in learning;
- more lower educated think that learning-by-doing in daily life is adequate;
- higher educated are more often of the opinion that it is necessary to continue learning;
- older people above 60 were likely to find learning through daily life inadequate.

### 3.2.8. Conclusions

The research results on actual participation supports the conclusion that learning for personal development assumes a relatively modest role in the lives of the Dutch adult population. About 20% actually participate in courses for personal development and a similar percentage has plans in this direction. None the less, this indicates an increase over the past. When work-related learning is added to the total, about 36% of Dutch adults participate in learning activities. The Dutch population recognises the importance of learning. Almost half the population has future plans and more than two thirds finds that adults need to continue learning in order to keep up in society. This picture applies to the total population, while some differences can be indicated on the basis of sex, age and educational level. With regard to the types of courses, hobby-related scored highly, but there is clear growth in interest for ICT-related courses. Learning foreign languages is in third place and is a relatively constant factor. The majority of respondents favour learning in a group with a teacher, but learning via the computer is increasing rapidly. With regard to the barriers to learning, the younger generation refers to lack of time, while the older generation points to their lack of study skills.

# 4. Conclusions

The preceding chapters have addressed the central question of how the idea of lifelong learning is influencing respectively the development of Dutch government policy, the provision offered by educational institutions, and demand among adults for education and training. This question was answered from a number of perspectives by the respective authors. In this concluding section we focus on a number of common themes in the contributions.

In the first part of this report, Hake and Van der Kamp explored in depth the recent developments in Dutch policy towards lifelong learning. They came to the conclusion that the Dutch government is primarily interested in lifelong learning in terms of economic motives. Since the mid-1990s, policy has been focused on turning the Dutch economy into a knowledge economy which involves seeking to improve the employability of the workforce. Lifelong learning is an important policy instrument in this transformation. Policy instruments introduced during the 1990s to promote lifelong learning were in particular concerned with improving the employability of the population. This emphasis on economic motives is also manifested in the parties involved in policy development. At government level this involves not only the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, but also the Ministries of Economic Affairs together with Social Affairs and Employment. Further, the social partners play an important role.

With reference to the educational system, it is clear that involvement of the government is still primarily concerned with the initial phase of education and training where the focus is upon equipping young people for a lifetime of learning. Up to now, policy has largely focused on enabling everyone to acquire a start qualification whereby the assumption is that this creates a basis for further learning. Recent developments, however, indicate growing recognition that both the government and the social partners are also responsible for post-initial education and training. Initiatives within the framework of the employability agenda support this. Learning and working are increasingly seen as essential aspects of the life cycle. In this regard, the division of responsibility involves that government is mainly concerned with risk categories, for example those not in possession of a start qualification, while the other actors are more concerned with further education and training.

The emphasis in learning and education is still largely focused on intentional formal learning. More recently, however, there is increasing interest in informal learning or learning in daily life. Economic interests seem to be also pre-eminent here. It is significant that, above all, the Ministry of Economic Affairs has demonstrated great interest in informal learning in the workplace. This interest is focused in particular upon the recognition of competences acquired in this manner. In the near future and at the initiative of this ministry, an expertise centre for the accreditation of prior learning will be established.

General adult education has not as yet become an objective of central government policy. Policy formation takes place primarily at the level of municipalities or is left to voluntary

initiative. The available evidence suggests that the majority of municipalities do not pursue an integral policy for the whole population. They appear to concentrate on so-called risk categories involving combinations of social benefits, employment, and learning. More recently the central government expressed some interest in general adult education. This was expressed, for example, in the organisation of a national week of learning following an initiative of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. This week emphasised the importance of non-work related adult education.

On this basis, two lines of development will be of importance in the near future. In the first place, the broadening of the conceptual and policy understandings of lifelong learning. This will focus on the relationship between work- and non-work related education together with the integration of initial and post-initial education. This will involve exploring the consequences for the whole system as well as the changing role of different actors. Secondly, more attention needs to be paid to informal learning and its contribution to a system of lifelong learning. This is necessary because so little is known in quantitative as well as qualitative terms about this kind of learning.

Westerhuis dealt with the question of the degree in which initial vocational education contributes to the development of lifelong learning. She concentrated in particular on secondary vocational and higher professional education. In the Netherlands, there seems to be significant consensus that initial education must lay the foundations for learning throughout life. However, it is not exactly clear what this involves in terms of the content of education. One of the points of discussion is the balance between technical and more general skills. In Dutch vocational education, the accent is increasingly placed on the acquisition of competences. Although it is quite easy to define this concept, a great deal of experimentation is taking place in translating it into the practice of learning processes. Departing from problems related to future occupations and the appropriate core competences offer a hopeful perspective for further developments.

As for access for adults to secondary vocational education, the first steps have been taken towards the accreditation of prior learning. A number of ROCs offer opportunities in this regard. There is, however, a significant lack of good procedures and methods, which means that many schools hesitatingly operate in this market. The work of the previously mentioned expertise centre could be an important stimulus.

Brandsma argued that relatively little is known about the degree to which the private training sector contributes to the promotion of lifelong learning in the context of company-based learning. Concepts such as competence management, worked-based learning and learning organisation seem to have acquired little body in practice. These concepts possess above all a high degree of 'academic wishful thinking'. The market for training in the business context seems to be largely dominated by the private sector. There has been a significant growth in this area in recent years. From the policy viewpoint, it is important to acquire more understanding of this sector in the future.

With regard to the demand for education and training, Houtkoop and Doets present the results of two recent empirical studies. Houtkoop concludes that almost half of the workforce actively participates in courses. There is a clear increase compared to a few years ago. Participation is primarily concerned with current performance at work. Broader concerns such as improving personal employability were mentioned less. Employers rather than individual employees take the initiative leading to participation in training. Participants seem above all to make use of the provision made by private training companies. Publicly-funded educational institutions command only a small part of this market. This means that lifelong learning for the working population takes place outside the public domain. The publicly-funded sector seems to attract a highly specific group. Participation is not equally distributed among employees. Older and low-educated workers participate the least.

Doets found that about 20% of the population older than 16 actively participate in courses for personal development. This also indicates an increase in comparison with earlier studies. Hobby-related courses assume an important place followed by ICT-related courses and learning foreign languages. There is a significant foundation among the population for a policy to promote lifelong learning. About three quarters of the population agrees with the proposition that every adult must continue to learn throughout life. Despite this positive picture, there is a relatively constant group of 20% of the total population who have absolutely no interest in learning whether for work of personal development. This significant 'non-public' for lifelong learning requires further investigation in terms of running the risk of social exclusion.

In conclusion, we can argue that the government and educational providers in the Netherlands have taken a number of steps in the direction of a society in which learning undertaken by adults assumes a significant place. The majority of the population seems to agree on the significance of learning throughout life while a large number actually participate in courses. Current policy, however, is fragmented and actually comprises a great number of more or less unrelated initiatives. These initiatives are determined by the political agendas in different policy areas. It is vital to pay more attention to the improved articulation of these initiatives with reference to: (a) the relationship between initial and post-initial education and training; (b) vocational and general education; (c) formal and informal learning; and, (d) learning in the public and private sectors.

# List of abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| APL | Accreditation of prior learning |
| AWT | Advisory Council for Science and Technology Policy |
| BBC | British Broadcasting Company |
| Bbl | *Beroepsbegeleidend onderwijs* (block or day release course) |
| Bol | *Beroepsopleidend onderwijs* (vocational training course) |
| BVE | *Beroepsopleidende volwassenen educatie* (vocational courses for adults) |
| CINOP | *Centrum voor de Innovatie van Opleidingen* (The National Centre for Innovation of Vocational Education and Training, the Netherlands) |
| EBB | Work force survey |
| HAVO | *Hoger algemeen voorbereidend onderwijs* (senior general secondary education) |
| HBO | *Hoger beroepsonderwijs* (higher professional education) |
| HEAO | *Hoger economisch administratief onderwijs* (higher commercial education) |
| HOOP 2000 | Higher education and research plan 2000 |
| HRD | Human resource development |
| HRM | Human resource manager |
| IALS | International adult literacy survey |
| ICTs | Information and communication technologies |
| ITS | Institute for Practical Science |
| LOB | *Landelijk Orgaan Beroepsonderwijs* (National Body for Vocational Education, the Netherlands) |
| MBO | *Middelbaar Beroeps Onderwijs* (senior secondary vocational education, the Netherlands) |
| MDW | Market principles, deregulation and legislative quality |
| MEAO | *Middelbaar economisch administratief onderwijs* (senior secondary commercial education) |
| NAP | National employment action plans |
| NKD | National knowledge debate |
| O&O fonds | *Onderwijs en Opleidingsfonds* (education and training fund) |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| | |
|---|---|
| OCenW | *Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschappen* (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science) |
| OECD | Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development |
| OU | Open University |
| REA | Handicapped Reintegration Act |
| RMC | Regional registration and coordination |
| ROC | *Regionaal opleidingscentrum* (regional training centre) |
| SER | *Sociaal economische raad* (Social-economic Council) |
| StvdA | *Stichting voor de Arbeid* (Labour Foundation) |
| Unesco | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation |
| VAVO | *Voortgezet algemeen volwassenen onderwijs* (adult general secondary education) |
| VET | Vocational education and training |
| VWO | *Voorbereidend Wetenschappelijk Onderwijs* (pre-university education) |
| WEB | *Wet Educatie Beroepsonderwijs* (Adult Education and Vocational Training Act) |
| WO | *Wetenschappelijk Onderwijs* (university education) |

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Cedefop (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training)

**Lifelong learning in the Netherlands: The extent to which vocational education and training policy is nurturing lifelong learning in the Netherlands**

Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities

2002 – VI, 115 pp. – 21 x 29.7 cm

(Cedefop Panorama series ; 21 – ISSN 1562-6180)

ISBN 92-896-0123-X

Cat. No: TI-42-02-755-EN-C

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The extent to which vocational education and training policy is nurturing lifelong learning in the Netherlands

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